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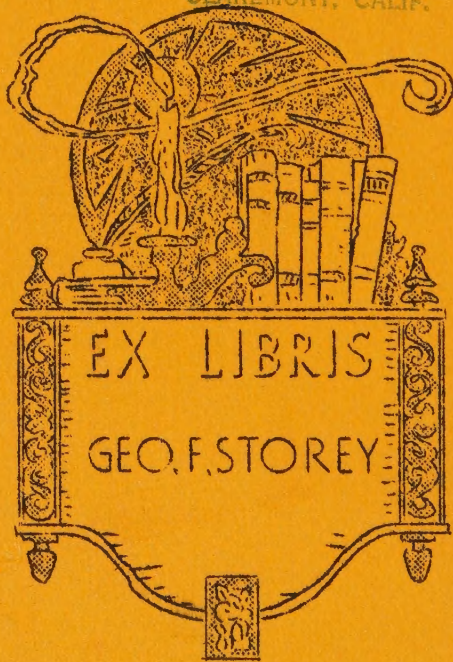
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BISHOPS AND THE  
SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM  
OF THE  
METHODIST EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH

THOMAS B. NEELY

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# THE BISHOPS AND THE SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

OF THE

## METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

By

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etc., etc.



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## Preface

EVERY now and then there comes a time when systems of civil government must be restudied and restated, and the same is true in regard to Church polity.

In the course of years the rush of events and absorption in other matters may distract attention from fundamental facts and principles. The old pass away and new generations may not know the history of the Church, and especially the organic principles which exerted themselves at the beginning and built up the ecclesiastical organization.

Through this lack of knowledge, the new generations are in danger of being governed by their own impulses or present desires, rather than by historic principles, and so serious mistakes may be made in legislation and in other forms of action. History having been forgotten or never known by the new generation, constitutional principles may not be recognized and, in time, may be utterly overlooked and injury may result. Every new generation, therefore, needs to be taught, and the seniors need to recall and review what they have known.

The study of history may bring surprises, and the student may be compelled to modify former

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## PREFACE

views and to correct misconceptions, but the investigation will enable him to perceive the balance and harmony of the system.

In this age of laxity and of indifference to law and the lessons of the past, it is important for those in the Church to know its organic law and the present force of that law, for, even in the Church, people sometimes make trouble simply because they do not know the law or comprehend the genius of their ecclesiastical organization.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church the time has come when there is need for a restatement of fundamental facts and principles in regard to its episcopacy and its supervisional system.

Much of this history has been forgotten, but, restated, it will be interesting and illuminating, while the constitutional principles herein presented will, it is hoped, help to a correct understanding of the polity of the Church.

My books on "The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism," and "The History of the Governing Conference in Methodism," have a relation to the subject of this work and may be regarded as companion volumes.

THOMAS B. NEELY.

*New Orleans, La., January 30, 1912.*

Being unable to read the proofs on account of episcopal duty in a foreign land, we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Reverend Doctor Richard J. Cooke, Book Editor of the Church, for his most valuable assistance in the proof-reading.

T. B. N.

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CHAPTER I  
ECCLESIASTICAL ROOTS



## CHAPTER I

### ECCLESIASTICAL ROOTS

LIKE a tree, an ecclesiasticism grows from its roots. To trace its origin and primary relations it is necessary to go down to its roots, and to understand its development one must ascend from its roots.

As the strength of a tree depends largely upon the spread and grip of its roots, so the security of an ecclesiasticism depends upon its grasp on the fundamentals of its existence.

As a tree depends upon its roots which are buried out of sight, so that which is most essential in an ecclesiastical organization may not be that which is most conspicuous, but that which is hidden from the ordinary gaze.

The real source of life may be unseen, and, because unseen, may be forgotten by superficial observers, who are interested only in the later developments which are in sight, just as one might limit his interest to the new shoots or recent branches of a tree, and fail to remember the buried roots to which the visible tree is related and which contribute so much to the life and vigor of the tree.

The visible ecclesiastical organism implies an invisible source of vitality, just as a plant which



## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

we see above ground implies the unseen roots which work to produce and contribute nourishment to the visible portion of the plant which men behold and admire.

If there were no roots there would be no tree, and there must ever be a vital connection between the tree and its roots. So there must always be a connection between the visible ecclesiastical organism and its unseen roots.

Sever the trunk from the roots and, though the leaves may remain green for a little while, nevertheless the tree is sure to die. So, if the vital connection of an ecclesiasticism with its ecclesiastical roots is severed, it will likewise perish. The vital relation between the organism which is seen and the root-forces which are unseen must be preserved if the life is to be continued.

Tree cultivation that does not take into consideration the roots is sure to be a failure, and the attempt to develop a Church organism without regard to its root beginnings is unphilosophical and futile.

Still more disastrous is the effort to cut away the ecclesiasticism from the root forces and ideas upon which it has depended and must depend. The ecclesiastical form may remain, but it will be without vitality—a decaying and dead body.

Now and then ecclesiastical reformers disregard or deliberately cut away from the past. The ax is not only laid at the root of the tree, but it is used to cut away the tree from its roots,

## ECCLESIASTICAL ROOTS

and the result is the death of the visible organization and of the roots from which the visible organism took its growth and drew its vitality.

The roots of a Church are close to its beginnings, and, because they may be out of sight or forgotten, so-called reformers, who may really desire improvement, are in danger of severing the ecclesiasticism from its vital roots. The ultimate result of such a course is injury and death to the body ecclesiastic.

No one can safely modify that which is seen without having regard for the unseen to which it is vitally related.

No one can wisely deal with the present who does not know the past. No one should attempt to change what is without knowing how it came to be what it is.

No one can understand a law who does not know the history of its making and the reasons that called it into existence, and no one should attempt to change a law or an ecclesiastical polity who does not know how and why it came into being. Moreover, no one can appreciate the polity of a Church who does not know its history. Only to those who know the beginnings is the beauty and wisdom of a system revealed.

The object of this writing is to enable those who read to go down below the present and find in the past some of the roots of our ecclesiasticism, so that the beginnings may be seen and the vital forces perceived and preserved. Then one may know the sources of what is seen and perceive

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

what is vital and essential. Then one may know where the roots are and what they are, and avoid or prevent the severing of the ecclesiasticism from its sources of vital supply, and continue the living relation between the ecclesiastical tree and its roots.



CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE WESLEYAN  
SYSTEM



## CHAPTER II

### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE WESLEYAN SYSTEM

THE beginnings of the Wesleyan system of what is commonly called Methodistic ecclesiastical government carry us back to Oxford University and the "Holy Club," as it was termed, and of which the Rev. John Wesley was the chief.

Here may be found the germ of many things which found their development in after years.

The departure of the Wesleys for America loosened but did not break the bonds which bound together John Wesley and his associates, for they continued generally to look up to him.

On his return to England there was some change in the alignment, but he was still regarded as the inspirational center.

The moral and religious conditions of Great Britain created or presented a situation which such a devout and earnest mind as that of John Wesley could not ignore.

Religious indifference in the Churches, indolence and lack of spirituality among the average clergy, irreligion in society, infidelity in influential quarters, and superabounding vice and crime in all directions and among all classes, demanded a radical reformation.

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

The practical question was how to change these conditions.

The fundamental need was to supplant the dead formality by a spiritual conception of religion, and by getting into the hearts of the people a personal religious experience.

To accomplish this widespread evangelistic preaching was necessary, and Wesley and his associates went here and there preaching a new evangel which was the old gospel of Christ and of the New Testament times.

The keynote was a different pitch and the sermonic strain seemed different from that with which the ordinary clergyman and the average church-goer had been familiar.

One result was that pulpits of the Established Church were closed against Wesley and his coadjutors, and these ministers went to the people out in the fields or wherever they could gather an audience to hear them.

The people in large numbers were impressed, convinced, and converted, and a reformation of morals and manners and a revival of genuine religion spread among the populace and touched the higher classes of society.

With these new ideas as to religion there was noticeable a new and better life among the people generally.

It is to be noted that in the Wesleyan movement there was a ministry before there was a membership, or, in other words, a clergy before there was a laity.

## BEGINNINGS OF WESLEYAN SYSTEM

This is an important point in the study of the initial form of the Methodist polity, and is the germ from which came the ecclesiastical tree.

In Methodism the ministry was chronologically first. There was a clergy before there was a laity, and this fact is a key to many things in the future system.

The Reverend John Wesley, the Reverend Charles Wesley and their coadjutors were prior to any organization, and began their work before they had a following.

This ministry went out to the people, many of whom, though formally connected with Churches, did not experience the power of vital religion, while it also went out to the populace that had no respect for the clergy and the Churches, and was indifferent to religion, or was steeped in ungodliness and in vice.

As a result of the preaching, the people were converted, and, being converted through the same agencies, they naturally gravitated toward each other, and at the same time were instinctively drawn to the Reverend John Wesley, the great leader in this evangelical movement.

Thus, as these ministers went to the people who gave them audience while they preached the simple and spiritual truths of New Testament Christianity, conversions followed and congregations were formed.

So the Wesleyan or Methodistic laity came into existence subsequently to the clergy, a most natural thing, but, at the same time, a fact of much

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

interest in studying the ecclesiastical evolution of Methodism.

Further, with a clergy and a laity, in relations as such, there began a new, though unpremeditated, ecclesiasticism that soon took its place among the great Churches of the world.



CHAPTER III  
WESLEY'S HEADSHIP



## CHAPTER III

### THE HEADSHIP OF THE REVEREND JOHN WESLEY

ACTING with him from a very early moment, the Reverend John Wesley had a body of ministers, some of whom were regularly ordained clergymen, while others were preachers who had not received ordination.

Just as it was with the members of the Oxford "Holy Club," so these ministers looked to the Reverend John Wesley as their natural leader and took directions from him.

The headship in early Methodism was in the Reverend John Wesley.

First, informally, when Wesley inaugurated and directed the new religious movement; and, secondly, in a more formal sense, when he became the formal head of the new religious organization, by being its formally chosen head.

So the governmental system began with the headship of the Reverend John Wesley, of England, in the first half of the eighteenth century.

When the converts, made through the efforts of Mr. Wesley, came together and associated themselves, at least in the expression of a desire for association and direction, they greatly needed a

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

competent guide, and it was natural that they would think of Mr. Wesley as the proper person to take the leadership.

Mr. Wesley tells how that eight or ten persons came to him in London "in the latter end of the year 1739" and desired that "he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come."

So "he appointed a day when they might all come together; which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening."

"This was the rise of the United Society, first in Europe, and then in America." (General Rules.)

So Mr. Wesley was selected by the people, and solicited by the people, before he consented to become their head.

He did not assume or arrogate to himself the position. He was chosen and invited. It seemed providential, and, regarding it as a divine call, he consented to accept the responsibility.

There was nothing of the nature of usurpation of power in it, but merely a yielding to their expressed desire.

So the ministers gathered around him and just as instinctively recognized him as their chief who was to direct their movements.

This was at the very beginning, and, for several years, before there was much formulation of legal requirements, but the ministers "served" Mr. Wesley "as sons in the gospel." (Wesley's Works, Amer. ed., Vol. V, pp. 220-222.)

## WESLEY'S HEADSHIP

In a letter written by the Reverend John Wesley in 1780, he says:

“It pleased God by me to awaken first my brother, and then a few others, who severally desired of me, as a favor, that I would direct them in all things. After my return from Georgia, many were both awakened and converted to God. One and another of these desired to join with me as sons in the gospel, to be directed by me. I drew up a few plain rules (observe there was no Conference in being!) and permitted them to join me on these conditions.” (Wesley’s Works, Amer. ed., Vol. VII, p. 228.)

Wesley did not arrogate to himself this power to make rules, neither did he glory in his position as the head of a new ecclesiasticism.

Referring to this point, Mr. Wesley said: “As it was merely in obedience to the providence of God and for the good of the people that I at first accepted this power, which I never sought—nay, a hundred times labored to throw off—so it is on the same considerations, not for profit, honor, or pleasure, that I use it this day. . . . I did not seek any part of this power; it came upon me unawares. But when it was come, not daring to bury that talent, I used it to the best of my judgment; yet I never was fond of it. I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden—the burden which God lays upon me—and therefore I dare not lay it down.” (Wesley’s Works, Amer. ed., Vol. V, pp. 220-222.)

So the Wesleyan organization began under the

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

headship of the Reverend John Wesley, to which position he was chosen at the beginning by both people and preachers.

Thus originally selected by the then existing constituency, he was subsequently tacitly but actually chosen by those who later came into the organization.

Those who came in later entered with the explicit understanding that they were to submit to Wesley's personal government as it had been determined at the beginning and then was in force. The new members who joined from time to time accepted the organization as they found it, and acquiesced in the headship of Wesley, and the ministers who came into the movement did the same, and their acquiescence was equivalent to new votes, or a new election, to his responsible position.

All elected, or agreed, to conform to the system as it then existed and acknowledged Wesley as their chief, and thus they practically and continuously elected him to his supreme position of authority. The adhesion of each new member or minister was like a new vote for Wesley and his government, and the new votes or acts of acquiescence as preachers and people became parts of the organization showed their approval of Mr. Wesley and his methods and their free choice of him as their director-general.

So, as long as he lived, his authority was assented to and freely acknowledged by the ministry



## WESLEY'S HEADSHIP

and the laity who joined at various times during the period of his long service covering more than a half a century.

Chosen as he was at the beginning, and continuously, as the movement spread and gathered growing numbers, Wesley was literally the head of the organization, as well as the religious movement. As the head, he thought. He was the thinker, the planner, and the director, whose word was obeyed.

In other words, Wesley was the law-maker, the law-interpreter, and the chief-executive. The government was concentrated in Wesley. In this one man, the legislative, the judicial, and the executive departments of the government were combined. He was a whole General Conference, which did everything by a unanimous vote on all questions, because the determination was left to him and he made the decision.

In 1743 he drew up "General Rules" for his societies. This was the first formulated code. Its principles were of remarkable breadth and in their details exceedingly practical.

The terms of membership were very liberal, as he said: "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.'"

Then he observes: "But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

“It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

“*First*: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced. . . .

“*Second*: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men. . . .

“*Third*: By attending upon all the ordinances of God.”

The specified details are suggestive and applicable to-day, still making good rules for holy living and for practical and applied Christianity. Wesley was a wise law-giver.

Wesley arranged the work, marking out the circuits, planning the operations, and determining various questions as they arose. He assigned the preachers to their several fields of labor, and, indeed, determined and directed everything, but doing so for the best interests of the work and after receiving the fullest possible information.

Wesley exercised great power, but he exerted his authority with great wisdom and consideration, and for the welfare of those he served and at the same time governed.

Methodism never had a better government, or a more successful administration, than it had under the Reverend John Wesley. He was the absolute head, and yet he was not a despot, who had seized or usurped authority, but was the free

## WESLEY'S HEADSHIP

choice of both members and ministers. He was the supreme government, but it was an intelligent, pious, and considerate government, which was itself governed by a desire to do God's will and to uplift the moral and religious life of the people.

Through Wesley's headship, it is to be observed, that from the very beginning the Wesleyan organization was a connectional system, in which, though the local society and the individual minister had their own separate and individual existence, all were interrelated and interdependent under a common and central authority, and the head center was the Reverend John Wesley.



CHAPTER IV

WESLEY'S SUPERVISIONAL METHODS





## CHAPTER IV

### WESLEY'S SUPERVISIONAL METHODS

THE ecclesiastical supervision in the early periods of Methodism was exceedingly thorough. It extended to every individual and in its requirements was strict and the spirit of more modern times might say it was severe.

If, however, there was a seeming severity, it was for the moral and religious protection of the organization, and the strictness was to restrain or eliminate the persistent wrongdoer, for the real spirit of the system was to encourage, aid, and strengthen those who were endeavoring to live right lives and who sought to be saved from spiritual failure.

It was a very significant entry Mr. Wesley at one time made in his Journal, where he said:

"The next week we endeavored to purge the society of all that did not walk according to the gospel. By this means we reduced the number of members to less than nineteen hundred. But number is an inconsiderable circumstance. May God increase them in faith and love!" (Wesley's Journal, Works, Amer. ed., Vol. III, p. 317.)

That meant the supervision of each and every member. It meant that the aim was not so much

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

quantity as quality. It meant that the test of quality was increase in Christian faith and love.

From the very beginning the superior and general supervision vested in Mr. Wesley.

At first this was so over the single society, and then, as other societies were added, his authority extended over all. In the same way it covered the few ministers at the beginning and later the whole body of the ministry, no matter how greatly the numbers increased.

Growing out of his relation to all he arranged the work and assigned the preachers to their several fields of labor.

In addition to these arrangements, he superintended every preacher and every society.

In exercising this general supervision, he did not, and could not locate himself in one place or limit himself, or be limited to a particular section of the field, but traveled far and wide, coming and going, crossing and recrossing his course, and extending it into new sections as he supervised generally the whole work.

Wesley was not restricted to a locality, and could not be, for he directed the work generally, and was a general supervisor. His duty of general supervision necessitated travel in many directions and to great distances, while the when and the where he would travel had to be determined by necessities as they arose.

In view of this superior and general supervision, Mr. Wesley could not be limited to one place or even be resident in one section. So he

## WESLEY'S SUPERVISIONAL METHODS

was found here or there as occasion seemed to require, and, it is plain, that, if he had been so restricted, he never could have accomplished the great work he performed.

In the very early days there was the preacher with Mr. Wesley as his superior. Then was organized the circuit, or charge, with its preaching places, and over the society was the preacher, through whom Mr. Wesley supervised the society.

Then came the suggestion that the society be subdivided into small bodies, which were called classes, and the placing of each subdivision under the care of a person called the class-leader.

This plan Mr. Wesley saw would make possible the most thorough scrutiny and supervision of every individual in the membership of the society, so that, as Wesley supervised through the preacher, the preacher could supervise each member through the leader.

Thus the General Rules, which were issued by Mr. Wesley, and which first appeared in 1743, said:

“That it may the more easily be discerned whether they (the members) are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a Class, one of whom is styled The Leader. It is his duty:

“1. To see each person in his Class once a week at least: in order, (1) To inquire how his soul prospers. (2) To advise, reprove, comfort,

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

or exhort, as occasion may require. (3) To receive what he is willing to give toward the relief of the Preachers, Church, and poor.

“2. To meet the Ministers and the Stewards of the Society once a week; in order, (1) To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reprov'd. (2) To pay the Stewards what he has received of his Class in the week preceding.” (The General Rules.)

This was a remarkable, though simple arrangement, and provided for the most thorough oversight of each and every member, no matter how lowly or lofty the member might be.

Whether the member came to the meeting of the class or not, the leader was to keep in touch with him in the most effective manner. Thus it was the duty of the leader, at least once a week, to have a religious conversation with the member, and to inquire how the member's soul prospered, and then, having ascertained his spiritual condition, the leader was to give the member appropriate advice, to reprove him if necessary, or to comfort or exhort him as the occasion might require.

This the leader could do because there were only a few persons under his care.

By the head of the class supervising the few, and the preacher supervising the leaders, and Wesley supervising the preachers, there was a most thorough supervision down to the last member.

## WESLEY'S SUPERVISIONAL METHODS

At the top was Wesley. Under him were the preachers. Under the preachers were the leaders. Under the leaders were the members. With such a system it was difficult for any member to be lost sight of.

Though supreme, Wesley did not govern without consideration of, or without consultation with, others.

In 1744 he began his custom of conferring with the preachers convened as a body. This assembly was called The Conference, and was composed of preachers and ordained ministers whom Mr. Wesley invited to meet with him.

Beginning with 1744, the Conference convened once a year, at comparatively regular intervals, and so became the yearly Conference of the preachers, and a fixed institution in Methodism.

With this Conference Mr. Wesley conferred though he made the decisions, and through it he announced the rules and largely directed the work.

Recognizing the need of more thorough local and subordinate supervision, for the work had steadily grown, as had also his duty as a director-general, Mr. Wesley determined to strengthen the local supervision.

He had superintended the societies directly, through the preachers, but his work as a general superintendent had greatly increased, as the societies and circuits grew, so that there was a growing necessity for a more sharply defined and stronger local supervision among and over the preachers of given localities, and over local opera-

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

tions, while he would be freer to attend to his own peculiar duty of general direction of the organization as a whole.

Recognizing this local need, Mr. Wesley, instead of trying to do the local as well as the general work of supervision, decided to create a new office that would insure more efficient local, and yet at the same time, subordinate, supervision.

So he created the office of Assistant, and by this new office placed certain preachers over other preachers.

Mr. Wesley called them Assistants, for they were his Assistants, to assist him in effectively supervising other preachers and in directing the local work.

Mr. Wesley's definition of an Assistant was:

"The preacher in each circuit who is appointed, from time to time, to take charge of the Societies and the other preachers therein." (English Minutes, 1749, Vol. I, p. 44.)

The preachers under the Assistants were called Helpers. They were the subordinate preachers, while the Assistants were their immediate superiors.

By this time the member of the Society was under the leader, the leader was under the preacher, the preacher was under the Assistant, and the Assistant was under the Reverend John Wesley.

Mr. Wesley was over all, and the supervisional system went down from him through the Confer-



## WESLEY'S SUPERVISIONAL METHODS

ence, the Assistants, the preachers, and the Class Leaders, to the last member.

It was a simple but suprisingly thorough system of ecclesiastical supervision.

With the creation of Assistants, Mr. Wesley provided for stronger local supervision, and, through the Assistants, administered the local work, while he was freer to direct the entire movement, while he traveled throughout the whole country and gave general supervision to the whole work.

This was a manifest gain for the body as a whole, and for the general movement, for Mr. Wesley was more valuable as he went over the field generally than if his time and energy had been absorbed in the details of local operations.

Wesley was not limited to a locality, but was over all and everywhere, and, though a general superintendent, was touching all, directing locally through his Assistants, while their influence was felt through the preachers, the leaders, and the entire membership of the society or the circuit.

In this way early Methodism under the Reverend John Wesley had both superior and subordinate supervision, each locality being cared for by its local officers, while the entire field had the general supervision of an unlocalized general superintendent.

Mr. Wesley was the itinerant general superintendent, and he administered the local work through the Assistants—his Assistants—who were local officers and local superintendents.

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

In the meantime, Methodism, with its strong supervisional system, was becoming more and more connectional.

At this stage the supervisional system has reached the following development:

Over the members was the leader; over the leaders was the preacher; over the preachers was the assistant; and over the assistants was the chief superintendent, the Rev. John Wesley.

Following the order of rank, we have 1st, Wesley; 2d, the Assistant; 3d, the Preacher; and, 4th, the Class Leader, under whom are the members.

In this is found the germ of the supervisional and directive system of Methodism.

CHAPTER V

EARLY SUPERVISION IN AMERICAN  
METHODISM



## CHAPTER V

### EARLY SUPERVISION IN AMERICAN METHODISM

WESLEYAN Methodism was originally carried to the middle Atlantic Coast of America without any particular missionary purpose, or under regular authority.

It was more like a seed carried by the winds of heaven which fell on good ground, took root, and flourished like a great tree giving shade and shelter, and bearing abundant fruit.

Immigrants who belonged to Wesley's societies in Great Britain carried Methodism to the English colonies in America.

Philip Embury and his company from Ireland carried it to New York, where, in 1766, Embury, as a Local Preacher, began Methodist services.

About the same time, some say a little earlier, Robert Strawbridge, another local preacher from Ireland, started Methodist services in Maryland.

None of these persons had been officially sent by Mr. Wesley to establish Methodism in America, but coming to America and having been trained as Methodists, they obeyed the impulse of their convictions and their religious training.

Familiar with Wesley's teachings and the organization of the body in Great Britain, there

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

soon grew up under them societies which were duplicates of those in the mother country.

They had preaching services, they had societies, and they had the subdivisions called classes, and over the classes they had leaders.

In a little time there was a rapid development and a steady expansion of the simple supervisory system of those early days, and almost by magic a new ecclesiastical body arose among the older denominations on American soil.

In 1769 Mr. Wesley sent Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, two itinerant preachers of the British Conference, to carry on his work which had been somewhat irregularly begun in the English colonies of North America, and the next year, 1770, the title "America" appeared in the list of appointments in the English Conference Minutes.

In 1771 Mr. Wesley sent two more missionaries from the English Conference to America. They were Francis Asbury and Richard Wright.

All these missionaries sailed for the port of Philadelphia, where they arrived in due time after the long voyages of that day.

The complete Wesleyan organization was rapidly forming. Like that of the mother country, it was destined to be much greater.

Mr. Wesley, however, was remote from his work in the American colonies. Three thousand miles of ocean rolled between him and his preachers and societies in the Western Continent.

There was the society organization, there were preachers, and there were preachers acting as As-

## EARLY SUPERVISION IN AMERICA

sistants, but Wesley was not present in person to immediately superintend the Assistants and directly supervise the work.

In view of the distance and his personal absence, some new arrangement was necessary. There was need for a substitute official who might personate Mr. Wesley.

So Mr. Wesley decided to create the office of General Assistant and place the General Assistant above the Assistants and over the entire work. In other words, the General Assistant, as Mr. Wesley's substitute, should be the general supervisor and director of the work in America.

The General Assistant in America represented Wesley and carried on the work in America as Wesley did in Great Britain, but subject to the rules and regulations as in the British body and subject to directions Mr. Wesley might give from time to time.

Wesley's first General Assistant in America was Francis Asbury, whom Mr. Wesley had sent to America in 1771.

In 1772, about a year after Mr. Asbury reached Philadelphia, he received a letter from the Reverend John Wesley, appointing him General Assistant.

This made Asbury the head of all the preachers and societies in America, with the right to appoint the preachers, and with other powers similar to those exercised by Mr. Wesley in Europe, but in a general sense he was subordinate to Mr. Wesley where he gave direction.

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The next year, 1773, however, Mr. Wesley sent Thomas Rankin and George Shadford from the English Conference to America.

Mr. Rankin had been a preacher longer than Mr. Asbury. For this reason, possibly, and, probably, for other reasons, Mr. Wesley appointed Rankin to be his General Assistant in America, thus superseding Asbury.

Mr. Rankin, the second General Assistant in America, landed at Philadelphia on the 3d of June, 1773.

Being a man of great executive ability, he wasted no time, but at once proceeded to perfect the organization in the English colonies, so that, though in a new and undeveloped land, it would be a very complete counterpart of the body in Great Britain.

Up to this time there had not been an Annual Conference of the preachers in America, but now Mr. Rankin summoned the first regular Annual Conference ever held in America, and it was held in the Saint George's Church in the city of Philadelphia, and opened on the fourteenth day of July, 1773. The second Conference convened in the same place in 1774, and the third in the same place in 1775.

So now American Methodism had the yearly Conference of preachers which had been established by Mr. Rankin, and it had every feature that was found in the British organization.

There was the General Assistant, representing Mr. Wesley and having similar authority, but sub-



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ject to his rules and directions, for, on both sides of the Atlantic, Wesleyan Methodism was one.

Under the General Assistant were the Assistants, under the Assistants were the Preachers or Helpers, under the Preachers were the Class Leaders, and under the Class Leaders were the members in the societies.

The War of the Revolution in the colonies greatly changed conditions.

Nearly all the English preachers, including Mr. Rankin, returned to England on account of hostilities between the American colonists and the mother country, and the broken connections between America and England left the American Wesleyans quite to themselves.

But their organization was left intact and the work was steadily carried on throughout the country, though temporarily impeded by the movements of the contending armies.

For a time there was no person actually bearing the title of General Assistant, but in one way or another the functions of that office were to some extent carried on.

In 1779, however, American preachers, at a Conference held that year in Delaware, authorized Francis Asbury to resume the title of General Superintendent, though he had been displaced by Rankin, and had not been reappointed by Mr. Wesley.

In that Conference the question was formally submitted:

“Ought not Brother Asbury to act as General

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Assistant in America?" and the following answer was made:

"He ought: 1st, on account of his age; 2d, because originally appointed by Mr. Wesley; 3d, being joined with Messrs. Rankin and Shadford, by express order from Mr. Wesley." (Minutes, 1779.)

This Conference, which met in April, 1779, at Judge White's, in Kent County, Maryland, did not contain all the preachers and was not the regularly called Conference, which was to meet, and did meet in May of that year, at Fluvanna, Virginia, yet Francis Asbury was again recognized as Wesley's General Assistant in America, so all the parts of the Wesleyan organism continued, notwithstanding the changed conditions of the country.

So the complete Wesleyan system, even to the Conference, was in operation in America. There was the pastoral charge or circuit with its quarterly meeting for the laity and there was the Annual Conference for the ministry.

There were the members with the Leaders caring for them; there were the Preachers supervising the Leaders; there were the Assistants over the Preachers; and there was the General Assistant over the Assistants and over all, and this General Assistant possessed the appointing power for the assignment of the preachers to their places, and possessed all authority that belonged to Wesleyan headship. Like Wesley, he was not

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restricted to a particular place or section of country, but, like him, superintended the work generally, and, like him, traveled here and there all over the work as his judgment dictated and the needs of the work required. In other words, he was an itinerant General Superintendent.



CHAPTER VI  
THE REORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN  
METHODISM



## CHAPTER VI

### THE REORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN METHODISM

THE reorganization of the Wesleyan body and its supervisional system in the United States of America is an interesting story.

The War of the Revolution had made many changes in the country, changes ecclesiastical as well as political.

As already seen, Wesley's English preachers, with the exception of Asbury, had returned to England, and during the years of the war, the American preachers, because of their isolation, had learned to take care of themselves. Indeed, so competent were they to do so that, under the stress of circumstances, they had decided to settle the question of an ordained ministry by ordaining their preachers themselves.

The influence and skill of Mr. Asbury and their reverence for the Reverend John Wesley, however, held them back until they could appeal to Mr. Wesley, whom they still recognized as their legal and spiritual head, and until he had an opportunity to aid them.

They had no ordained ministers and their people were suffering from lack of the sacraments.

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

Even the children were going without baptism, for ordained ministers of Protestant denominations had diminished in number and many of the Church of England clergymen had disappeared.

Still the work had held together, and the preachers continued their appeal to Mr. Wesley to furnish them an ordained ministry of their own, so that, in the matter of the sacraments they would be independent of other bodies.

Mr. Wesley had endeavored to induce an English Bishop—the Bishop of London—to ordain one of his preachers for America, but his entreaties resulted in failure, and he was thrown back on his own resources.

In the meanwhile, some important changes in the situation had taken place:

First, the old Colonies, transformed into States, had fought the war for independence to a successful finish.

Second, as the United States had become an independent nation, the Church of England no longer had authority in the territory covered by the new Republic.

Third, in 1783, the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States of America was signed, and Great Britain definitely and finally acknowledged the said United States, made up of her former colonies, to be an independent nationality.

All these things meant very much to a staunch English clergyman who had tried to be loyal to his country and faithful to her laws, both civil



## THE REORGANIZATION IN AMERICA

and ecclesiastical, including respect for the State Church in its governmental relations.

Now, after the Colonies had gained their independence he gave more careful and sympathetic heed to the appeals of his American followers for an ordained ministry in the United States of America.

Finally, in 1784, the very next year after the signing of the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States, the last act in the recognition of the new Republic, Mr. Wesley decided to make a new departure in the United States by granting what his American followers requested in regard to orders for the ministry, and by going far beyond their most sanguine expectations.

First, he decided to ordain some preachers to start a line of ordained ministers for his followers in America. It may be asked by what authority he could ordain. The first answer is, on the ground of necessity. His people in America were in distress and the English bishops would not aid him, as he had proven.

Second, his very position empowered him. He himself was a regularly ordained clergyman in full orders, and was the head of an independent ecclesiastical organization, which was and always had been independent of any control by the Church of England.

Third, he was the superior and the overseer of ordained clergymen, as well as of unordained preachers, and a large and growing ecclesiastical

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

body recognized him as supreme and as having all authority over it and its affairs.

As an ecclesiastical overseer and a presbyter over presbyters, he claimed he was a true bishop, while as a presbyter he claimed that he had a right to ordain. Wesley as the supreme supervisor of all was an actual bishop, the head of an ecclesiasticism. So he asserted that he was as true an episcopos as any bishop, and said:

“I firmly believe I am a Scriptural ἐπίσκοπος, as much as any man in England or in Europe.”

Possessing the full clerical order of presbyter, with regularly ordained presbyters under him, equal in order but supreme in office, recognized as the head by all in this independent religious organization, containing both clergy and laity, he was the supreme overseer, a true episcopos, a real and actual bishop.

Wesley's views as to episcopacy and the distinction as to clerical orders changed quite early in his ministerial career.

His early training made him a high churchman and such he was when he sailed to do missionary work in America.

On his way and while he was in Georgia, he was greatly impressed by the spirituality of Moravians and by their simple setting apart of one to be a bishop.

In the year 1746, on his way to Bristol, England, he read Lord King's “Account of the Primitive Church,” and by this book he was convinced

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that "bishops and presbyters are the same clerical order, and, consequently, have the same right to ordain." (Wesley's Circular Letter to the American Methodists, written in 1784.)

He also read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*, and, after reading it, he wrote: "I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain as to administer the Lord's Supper."

Being a presbyter in authority over presbyters, and, being the head of an independent religious organization, which was an ecclesiasticism, including a clergy as well as a laity, Mr. Wesley regarded himself to be a Scriptural Bishop.

He was over ministers, ordained as well as unordained preachers; he was the head of an extended and extending ecclesiastical organization. An *episcopos*, bishop, was an overseer, and he was an overseer or ecclesiastical superintendent, and, therefore, was an actual bishop. Being convinced that the highest clerical order in the Church was that of presbyter or elder, he, being a duly ordained presbyter, had a right to do what pertained to the highest order, and, consequently, could ordain.

Ecclesiastically as the head and overseer of his own religious organization, there was no human power over him in this relation and he could do in and for his own organization what he deemed best. So he decided to ordain some of his preachers.

To start an ordained ministry in the United

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

States of America, he, therefore, on this basis, decided to ordain two of his English preachers and to send them to America.

To do this he did not act by himself, but associated with himself two clergymen who had been duly ordained in the Church of England, but who served under him and recognized him as their ecclesiastical head, and, so to speak, as their bishop, and who both were members of his Conference.

These clergymen were the Reverend James Creighton and the Reverend Thomas Coke, D. C. L., of Oxford University, and the preachers he ordained, with the assistance of Doctor Thomas Coke and the Rev. James Creighton, were Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey.

Secondly, he decided to give his societies in America a complete Church organization.

In pursuance of this intention, he took the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and greatly modified it, particularly by elimination. He cut the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion down to twenty-four. He prepared a comprehensive service book, with morning and evening prayers for Sundays, and a Litany for Wednesdays and Fridays, and various liturgical services for set occasions, as well as services for setting apart and ordaining a clergy.

Thirdly, he provided for this new Church in America a strong and centralized supervision, with officers who would have appointing power such as he himself possessed.

## THE REORGANIZATION IN AMERICA

Here he introduced a new title, namely, that of Superintendent. It was to be a Church with an ordained ministry and other requisites for a Church, while over the ministry and the Church was to be a superintendency exercised by officers he called Superintendents.

Heretofore the Assistants and General Assistants had been unordained men, but the office of Superintendent was to be of higher rank, and, as this officer was to oversee ordained ministers, the Superintendent must himself be in clerical orders.

For the office of Superintendent in this proposed American Church he selected Doctor Thomas Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury, the latter being in America, as he said in his circular letter to his American followers: "I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America." (Wesley's Works, Amer. ed., Vol. VII, pp. 311, 312.)

For this work he set Dr. Coke apart in a solemn manner and gave him a formal certificate stating the fact.

Mr. Wesley does not say that he ordained the Reverend Doctor Coke a Superintendent, but that he set him apart. The language in the certificate, which was dated the second day of September, 1784, is:

"I have this day set apart as a Superintendent, by the imposition of my hands, and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

Coke, doctor of Civil Law, a presbyter of the Church of England. . . . And I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ." (Samuel Drew, "Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, D. C. L.," New York, 1847, p. 74.)

Mr. Wesley would define the Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*, *episcopos* (bishop), as an overseer, and, in the mind of Wesley, the title of Superintendent in the Church where the party was an ordained minister whose duty it was "to preside over the flock of Christ" was equivalent to overseer, *episcopos*, or bishop.

In his vocabulary, Superintendent was the same as bishop, but he preferred Superintendent, possibly to avoid the appearance of prelatical episcopacy.

Certainly he was providing for an ecclesiastical organization which should be a complete Church with all that pertains to a Church and proposing to place these Superintendents in the position occupied by bishops in other Churches, at least as far as they were overseers "to preside over the flock of Christ," and he had expressed his preference for episcopal government.

The Service Book shows that Wesley meant the Wesleyan body to be a complete Church. His circular letter shows he meant it to be separate and distinct from all other Churches. The changes he made in the Prayer Book show that he meant it to be different in these particulars from the Church of England.

## THE REORGANIZATION IN AMERICA

The designation of the chief officer of the new Church shows that he meant the Church to have a government of oversight with supervisional authority of the nature of an episcopate. In other words, it was to be an episcopal Church with variations from the State Church of England and of the Colonies.

On this great mission, Doctor Coke, the Superintendent, and the Reverends Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, the new presbyters, sailed from Bristol, England, on the eighteenth day of September, 1784. They were to bring about the reorganization of American Methodism with a strongly centralized supervisional government.





CHAPTER VII

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE METHODIST  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DOCTOR COKE and his companions carried with them across the Atlantic the Service Book which Mr. Wesley had prepared for the reorganized body in America.

Dr. Coke also had the certificate of his consecration, or setting apart, for the work of presiding over the reorganized body.

In addition he carried a Circular Letter from the Reverend John Wesley, the head of Methodism in America, as well as in Great Britain, to his followers in the new nation—the United States of America.

The letter was dated: "Bristol, September 10, 1784," and was addressed: "To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in North America."

It recognizes the independence of the once colonies of England and refers to the consequent changes both civil and ecclesiastical. It recognizes that his people in America "are now totally disentangled from the (English) State and from the English hierarchy" and says he "dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other," and that his people in the new nation "are

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now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church.”

In the letter he asserts the parity of order of bishops and presbyters, and maintains his right to ordain, and states what he has done to provide for the churchly reorganization of American Methodism.

As far as Wesley was concerned, this was the Charter—the Magna Charter—of the reorganized Methodism of the United States, and, to all intents and purposes, became a part of the organic law or constitution of the new Church.

Doctor Coke and his associates landed at New York on the third of November, 1784, and after a short stay in that city, Dr. Coke journeyed southward to meet Mr. Asbury, and, on the thirteenth day of that month he reached Dover, Delaware, where he was entertained in the home of the Honorable Richard Bassett, a member of the society, and one of the most distinguished citizens of the State, a Captain in the Continental Army, later a member of the State Council of Delaware, member of the Convention that drafted the Constitution of the United States, Senator of the United States, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and Governor of Delaware.

The next day Doctor Coke went to Barratt's Chapel, about ten miles from Dover, a chapel built for the Methodists by Philip Barratt, another prominent member of the Methodist Society, who held high offices in the State of Delaware.

Here, as it was Sunday, Doctor Coke officiated.

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During the service Mr. Asbury entered the building and, after the sermon, saluted Dr. Coke.

Consultation between Doctor Coke and Mr. Asbury, and some fifteen ministers who were present, resulted in a decision "to call a Conference of all the preachers on the Continent," (Doctor Coke's Journal, *Arminian Magazine*, Philadelphia, 1789, pp. 243, 244) to meet in the city of Baltimore "the ensuing Christmas."

The Conference opened on Christmas eve, and covered Christmas week, and hence has been spoken of as the "Christmas Conference."

When Mr. Asbury was informed that Mr. Wesley had appointed him to be a Superintendent, he said: "If the preachers unanimously choose me, I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Mr. Wesley's appointment." (Asbury's Journal, 1820, Vol. I, p. 376.)

Heretofore no officer had been elected by the Conference, and the Conference was not a deciding body, but if the Conference elected Mr. Asbury and decided the question of forming a new Church, it would cease to be merely a conferring body and would become a governing power. So, when Mr. Asbury said to Dr. Coke, "We will call the preachers together and the voice of the preachers shall be to me the voice of God," (Thomas Ware's *Autobiography*, New York, 1840, p. 102), it meant that personal government was to cease, and the Conference government was to begin.

Thus Asbury's decision led to the change of the Conference from a body that merely conferred

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with its appointed head to a deliberating, deciding, and governing body.

According to Asbury, it was "The design of organizing the Methodists into an Independent Episcopal Church," that "was opened to the preachers present" at Barratt's, and which was to be submitted to the specially called Conference at Baltimore. (Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, p. 376.)

The "Christmas Conference" of 1784 decided to become an independent "Episcopal Church." The Book of Discipline adopted by that Conference says, "We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church," and Asbury records, "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church." (Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, pp. 377, 378.)

This organizing Conference accepted what it understood to be Wesley's plan.

It formed an Episcopal Church, and then it prefixed the qualifying word Methodist, so that it was known as "The Methodist Episcopal Church."

It adopted the Articles of Religion, and so had a creed; it accepted the Service Book, and so had liturgical forms for stated occasions.

It had an episcopacy, and so elected Coke and Asbury under the title of Joint Superintendents.

To this episcopate it set apart or consecrated Francis Asbury, but it did not consecrate Doctor Coke, for he had already been set apart for the

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

work of a Superintendent by the head of Methodism, the Reverend John Wesley.

It elected preachers to the orders of deacon and elder, and they were duly ordained.

The new Church was an Episcopal Church, not of the prelatical kind, but of the Wesleyan, and hence it was named The Methodist Episcopal Church.

It was an episcopal Church and, therefore, had an episcopacy, and its Superintendent was its *episcopos*, or bishop, the titles being equivalent.

As an episcopal Church it had a thorough supervisory system, insuring oversight in every direction and over all, and that system has its crown in the episcopate, but under the episcopate are other graded officers who, by connected stages, carry the supervision down to the humblest member.

The new body had all the organism of the old body, but with developments and additions.

Some changes appear in titles. General Assistant is more than absorbed in the title and work of Superintendent.

Assistant itself disappears, for it is now a self-governing Church with clerically ordained preachers, and the officer is no longer Wesley's Assistant as he had been before.

Now that American Methodism had an ordained ministry its higher officials had to be men in orders.

The word Assistant, as indicative of a super-

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

vising officer, drops out, and in its place there is substituted the word elder.

Instead of the old question, "Who act as Assistants this year?" we find in the Minutes of the organizing Conference, which were printed in 1785, the question, "Who are the elders?" The era of ordained preachers had begun and elder indicated what Wesley regarded as the highest clerical order in the Christian Church, and the "Elder" in this connection indicates a presbyter over other preachers and the head of a district.

In 1789 appears the title "Presiding Elder," which more clearly expressed the function of the elder—a minister in elder's orders who presided over other preachers. Then for a time the explanatory word "presiding" was disused, but in 1792 it reappeared and continued until 1908, when to the surprise and dissatisfaction of many the historic title "Presiding elder" was changed to District Superintendent.

At the organization the most striking changes in titles were from General Assistant to Superintendent, and from Assistant to Elder, or Presiding Elder.

With these changes of title the new denomination had a counterpart and continuance of the Wesleyan supervisional system.

Instead of Wesley, or the General Assistant, was the Superintendent, and instead of Assistant was the Elder or Presiding Elder. All the rest remained the same and the system of supervision was essentially or exactly the same.



## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

At the base was the Class Leader over the member, the Preacher over the Leaders, the Presiding Elder over the Preachers, and the Superintendent over the Presiding Elders. Reversing the order, there was first, the Superintendent; second, the Presiding Elder; third, the Preacher; and fourth, the Class Leader.

The title Superintendent, however, was soon to give way to the word Bishop, or rather Bishop and Superintendent were to be used as synonyms.

In the Minutes of 1785 there first appeared the question, "Who are the Superintendents of our Church?" In 1787 the question in the Minutes read, "Who are the Superintendents of our Church for the United States?" but in the Book of Discipline for that year the title Bishop was introduced for the first time, and in the Minutes for 1788 the question became, "Who are the Bishops of our Church for the United States?"

In 1789 the question read, "Who are the Persons that exercise the Episcopal Office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?" and there follows: "*Ans.* John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury." Then comes a new question: "Who have been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference to superintend the Methodist connexion in America?" with "*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

In 1790 the order of these questions was reversed, and instead of "the Methodist connexion in America," the reading is "the Methodist Episcopal Church in America."

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When Europe and America were linked together there were three in the episcopate, namely, "John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury," but when the United States of America stood separately there were only two, "Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury." They were bishops for the United States.

In 1791, the question, "Who are the Persons that exercise the Episcopal Office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?" disappears from the Minutes, for Wesley had died on the second of March of that year and there was no longer any occasion for continuing the question with its answer.

In 1792 the word Bishop is introduced more generally in the Book of Discipline. In 1800 a new question is substituted in the Minutes, namely: "Who are the bishops? *Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, Richard Whatcoat," and, under the question: "Where are the Preachers stationed this year. *Ans.* As follows:

"Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, and Richard Whatcoat are elected by the General Conference to superintend the Methodist Episcopal Church in America."

The phrase, "by the unanimous suffrages," disappears for the simple reason that Richard Whatcoat did not get the unanimous vote of the General Conference when he was elected to the bishopric.

The change to the word bishop was a change in the title, but not a change of the thing.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Coke and Asbury used the word bishop as the equivalent of Superintendent, and the Conference subsequently acquiesced and approved.

Wesley's idea was that a bishop was an overseer or superintendent and that the words in the Church were synonyms. With Wesley's definition of a bishop as a ministerial overseer, or superintendent over ministers, and over an ecclesiastical organization, in mind, no violence was done by using bishop and superintendent interchangeably, and that is precisely what the Americans did, for they kept up the title Superintendent and sometimes said Superintendent and sometimes said Bishop. Further, by using the two titles, they showed the nature of their episcopate, that their episcopacy was a superintendency, and their bishop was a superintendent.

Wesley had not used the word bishop in reference to the highest officer in the reorganized American Methodism, but logically he would have admitted that superintendent, or overseer, and bishop were synonymous and might be used interchangeably.

But these Americans were separated from Wesley by an ocean three thousand miles wide, and they now had their own Church. Being independent, and using their self-governing power, they had a right to use either one word or the other, or both words, and especially as they had Wesley's definition of episcopal orders: "Bishops and presbyters are the same order, and, consequently, have the same right to ordain."

## BISHOPS AND SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

So they used both words, and, as the usual title, the word bishop, because it meant the same, because it was the shorter word and more easily pronounced, because it was the historic term, and because it was the dignified and churchly title and more appropriate for ecclesiastical purposes.

The American Methodists now have a complete Church organization. It is not a body of independent individual preachers and of isolated and independent Churches, but a connectional system in which all are related and connected and under the common control and centralized authority of the Conference.

Neither is it a body in which the individual ministers, Churches, or members can follow their own sweet will according to any impulse or purpose that may sway them individually, but a body which has a well-developed and thorough supervisory system that extends from the top down to the bottom, so that every one down to the humblest member is under the oversight and has the care of some duly constituted authority.

The preachers did not determine the pastoral charges they would serve, and the charges did not elect their pastors, but, according to the law and the understanding, the power of selection and appointment belonged to the bishops.

The bishop was charged with the responsibility of determining what preacher should go to a given charge. The power of appointment was lodged with the bishop, and, when the bishop appointed the preacher, he went to the charge to

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

which he was appointed and the congregation received him as his duly appointed pastor.

Then, the bishop had the supervision of the Presiding Elders; the Presiding Elder supervised the preachers on his district and cared for the local work; the preacher-in-charge supervised the preachers under him; the preacher supervised the class leaders, and the class leader supervised the private members.

It was a supervisional as well as a connec-tional system.

This supervisional system of the Methodist Episcopal Church at its organization was a very exact duplicate of the plan adopted in England by the Reverend John Wesley, and the Bishop or Superintendent in the United States occupied very much the same relative position as that occupied by Wesley in England.

The same appointing power vested in the bishop with the same duty of superintendence of the general work, and the same necessity for freedom to travel from point to point as occasion required.

But a new and modifying element had come in, namely, a Conference with an enduement of power and that could vote and make rules and regulations for the Church. This Wesley's Conference did not possess, but in the new American Church it was not to be a government by bishops, but a government with bishops and with a Conference together. This was involved in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.



CHAPTER VIII

THE EPISCOPACY OF THE METHODIST  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EPISCOPACY OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

THE Methodist Episcopal Church, when it was organized in 1784, immediately had an episcopacy. It was involved in the very title, and the organization of "an Episcopal Church" necessarily carried with it an episcopacy.

At the very beginning it had an episcopacy in its superintendency. The superintendency was its episcopacy, and the superintendent was the *episcopos*.

When the title of bishop, as the equivalent of an ordained superintendent over an ordained clergy, came into use, as it did speedily, the word and its import were so familiar that every one knew the episcopacy was the bishopric, and that the bishops were the *episcopoi* of the new episcopal Church.

The episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, however, did not claim to be exactly like the episcopate in some other ecclesiastical bodies. On the contrary, it maintained that it was different.

The episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church was well defined in Wesley's circular letter, which Doctor Coke carried from Wesley to Wesley's followers in the United States.

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First, it was to be of the New Testament kind and the kind found in the Primitive Church. So the letter stated that, in view of the fact that the civil authority of Great Britain had ceased to have sway in the territory of the new nation and that the people were disentangled from the English hierarchy, they were "now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."

That reveals the intention to reproduce as far as possible the early Christian Church, and particularly to imitate the simplicity of the episcopacy of the New Testament Church.

Second, the episcopacy was to be what Mr. Wesley had concluded was characteristic of the episcopacy of the Primitive Christian Church, namely, that bishops had no higher clerical order than presbyters or elders, or, as Mr. Wesley phrased it, "Bishops and presbyters are the same order, and, consequently, have the same right to ordain." (Wesley's Circular Letter to the American Methodists.)

That is the key to the nature of the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is not a prelatical or high-church episcopacy with a higher clerical order than the eldership, but an episcopacy with the "same order" as that possessed by presbyters or elders, and with no higher order.

This became the corner-stone of the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The question is not as to a higher order by

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divine right—*jure divino*—but that it was not a higher order in any sense.

It may be said that the Church could have made as many orders as it desired, but, as a matter of history, it liked to make only one full and inclusive clerical order, namely, that of the eldership, with one subordinate order, the diaconate.

It is not so much what the Church might have done, but what it did do.

The Church's aim was to reproduce the Christian Church of the New Testament or apostolic times. So Wesley was influenced to go back to the ideas and forms of the Primitive Church, in 1746, by reading Lord King's book, "An Enquiry Into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church," in which work he read that the presbyters "were of the very same specific order with them (the bishops), having the same inherent right to perform those ecclesiastical offices which the bishop did."

That view Wesley had held for thirty-eight years, and then, in 1784, worked them out in practical action.

The American Wesleyans accepted that doctrine, and it entered into the life-blood and the brain-action of the new Church, which they formed with the title of The Methodist Episcopal Church.

The essence of a clerical order relates to the sacraments. That is a test of distinction in orders.

A presbyter has complete authority as to the sacraments.

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A deacon, who has not as high an order, can not do quite so much sacramentally.

A Methodist Episcopal bishop has no higher function as to the sacraments than the humblest elder.

High Church bishops claim more, and have something more conceded to them by High Churches, and, therefore, they administer the right of confirmation, which is regarded as the completion of the sacrament of baptism.

But some one may say, Nevertheless, are they not ordained? Are they not set apart with a special service, and are not holy hands laid upon their heads? But the President of the United States is inaugurated with an installation ceremony, but he is not ordained. So other officers are ushered into their duties, but the form does not constitute an ordination. So the setting apart by a special service to a special duty is not an ordination unless a specific clerical order is conferred.

If, however, no additional order is conferred, then it is not an ordering service and by it they are not ordained.

If there is no higher order than the eldership, and they were elders before the service, then the service is not an ordination, for no additional order is given.

The Methodist Episcopal Church does not recognize a third, or additional, order, and, consequently, its service can not be an ordination.

The Church holds that the episcopate is not

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an order but an office, that a bishop is an elder in office over elders, with the same clerical order, but with a higher office—a *primus inter pares*, an elder officially over other elders.

With this view, the service is not an ordination service, but an installation ceremony setting apart an elder for a higher official position.

Setting apart is Wesley's idea and phrase, and in his certificate for Doctor Coke, he does not say he had ordained him, but that he had "set apart."

There has been some confusion by the older writers, and even by Wesley himself, when not definitely distinguishing between words, but when the occasion required an exact use of terms, they made it plain that a bishop was not ordained to any higher clerical order than that possessed by a presbyter.

So Wesley distinctly declared that the order of the bishop and the order of the presbyter were "the same order."

Coke and Asbury make a sharp distinction between the nature of the service for the presbyter and the service for the setting apart of a bishop.

The former they call an ordination, while they call the latter a consecration.

In their "Notes to the Discipline," prepared at the request of the General Conference of 1796 by Bishops Coke and Asbury, they have a section on "The Election and Consecration of Bishops, and of their Duty;" they speak of the consecra-

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tion of bishops when they are making discriminating statements. Thus they say, "to consecrate a bishop."

They have another section, "Of the Election and Ordination of Traveling Elders," and still another, "Of the Election and Ordination of Traveling Deacons," and they speak of "the ordination of elders and deacons." So when speaking with exactness they say, "the consecration of bishops" and "the ordination of elders and deacons," showing that consecration and ordination are not the same, and that the setting apart of a bishop is not an ordination, but a consecration.

Apparently, on account of haste in the preparation of his "Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America and Other Occasional Services," which he made up from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, Mr. Wesley did not eliminate the word ordination from the form, but in other places he made it exceedingly clear that the bishop received no third order, or any order above that of the eldership.

When he said, "Bishops and presbyters are the same order," he certainly did not mean or believe that when a presbyter or elder was made a bishop, that the one made bishop received any higher order. If there was no order higher than that of the eldership, the person made bishop could not have received any higher order.

It is to be observed that Wesley does not say he ordained the Presbyter Coke to any higher order, or, indeed, that he ordained him at all.

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What he said in Doctor Coke's certificate was not that he ordained him, but that he set him apart—"I have this day set apart as a superintendent," etc.

The true principle of interpretation is not to interpret by that which is obscure or contradictory, but by that which is clear, and particularly when the specific aim is to give an exact definition.

The General Conference of 1844 most emphatically taught that the episcopate was not an order, but an office, and the debaters repeated and reiterated the declaration again and again, and in their arguments spoke of the "consecration" of bishops. The bishops in their episcopal addresses affirm that the episcopacy is "not a distinct and superior *order*," or a "distinct and higher *order*," and they italicize the word *order*. The restate Wesley's view "that bishops and presbyters are the same order," and speak of the bishopric as "an office." (T. B. Neely, "The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism," New York, 1888, pp. 387-408.)

In 1864 the General Conference undertook to remove certain incongruities from the Ritual which, coming down from distant centuries, did not truly represent the views of the Church.

One thing it did was to remove from the service for setting apart bishops the word ordination and to substitute the word consecration. So there was no longer room for misunderstanding. It was not an ordination to an order, but a consecration to the performance of certain official



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duty in the Church, of an elder elected to and set apart for the episcopal office.

Plainly from that time every bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church has been consecrated and not ordained to the episcopate.

In the General Conference of 1884, certain High Church expressions in regard to the episcopacy had escaped the lips of certain debaters on the floor.

One offered the following: "Resolved, That we reaffirm the doctrine of the fathers that the episcopate is not an order but an office, and that elders and bishops are the same order."

The resolution was adopted by an overwhelming vote.

So in 1844, 1864, and 1884, at intervals of twenty years, the General Conferences took occasion to enunciate the same doctrine.

Then the same member who had presented the aforementioned resolution, not wishing to appear too frequently on the same general matter, privately saw the Rev. Doctor Daniel Curry and induced him to prepare a paragraph to be printed with the service for setting apart the bishops.

So he wrote and presented the following: "This service is not to be understood as an ordination to a higher order in the Christian ministry, beyond and above that of elders or presbyters, but as a solemn and fitting consecration for the special and most sacred duties of superintendency in the Church."



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This also was adopted and inserted by a sweeping majority.

This Rubric, as Dr. Curry called it, has stood in connection with the service for setting apart bishops since May, 1864, now about twenty-eight years, saying the service is not an ordination but a consecration, in harmony with Wesley's idea, and the very word used by Bishop Coke and Bishop Asbury in their "Notes on the Discipline."

With these facts made so public, there seems no excuse for speaking of the "ordination of bishops," and still less for saying that the bishops have a higher order, and in view of the declaration that stands at the head of the consecration service saying that it is not an ordination, no one in the Church has a legal right to say one is ordained a bishop, or to call the service for setting apart a bishop an ordination.

To illustrate: The President of the United States is a citizen of the same order, so to speak, as other citizens, but, though a citizen like other citizens, he is in an office over all other citizens. To this office he has been elected, and into this office he has been inducted by an inaugural ceremony, and still he is a citizen among other citizens.

So the bishop in order is only an elder among other elders, but as an officer he is over other elders, and notwithstanding a service of induction he remains an elder still—an elder in order, but a bishop in office. As the President, so to speak, is a citizen in order, but a President in office.

This fact, that the episcopate is an office and

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not an order, does not make the bishop any the less worthy of honor.

The President has no order of nobility. He is a citizen as other citizens, but he is honored because of his high office to which he has been elected by the citizen voters, and likewise the bishopric is worthy of respect though it is not a clerical order, but a lofty ecclesiastical office to which an elder has been elected and elevated by the suffrages of the Church.

Some may say: Well, what is the difference whether the bishopric is an order or an office? That, however, is not the point. The question is as to the fact that it is not a higher order. But as to the practical or ecclesiastical difference, the answer is, Much every way, but this is not the place to take this excursion.

The episcopate in the Methodist Episcopal Church is like unto that of the Primitive Christian Church.

Paul addresses the same persons as both elders and bishops. While they were bishops, they were also elders. Wesley's aim was to reproduce the characteristics of the early Christian Church, and that was the aim of those who organized the Methodist Episcopal Church. As Wesley told them, "They were now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."

The episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church was not like that which developed centuries after the beginning of the Christian Church. It was not a High Church episcopacy. It was not

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a higher order episcopacy. It was not a prelatical episcopacy. But it was to be a New Testament episcopacy with presbyter-bishops who as overseers superintended the affairs of the Church, but who did not rule like the bishops of certain Churches and certain ages. So the episcopal government of the Methodist Episcopal Church is not a government by bishops, but a government with bishops.

But while a Methodist Episcopal bishop has no higher order than that of a presbyter, yet he has greater power than a presbyter. Though having no higher order than that of an elder, yet the bishop has a higher office given him under the Constitution of the Church by his election from among the presbyters to perform the work of superintendence over presbyters and others in the Church, and, by the very nature of his office, charged with serious and sacred duties and clothed with authority to discharge the same.

Such is the simple and Scriptural character of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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For a fuller treatment of this particular subject see my "Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism," published by the Methodist Book Concern, New York and Cincinnati.



CHAPTER IX  
THE BISHOPRIC DOWN TO 1808



## CHAPTER IX

### THE BISHOPRIC DOWN TO 1808

IN regard to the episcopate, as well as other features of the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, there have been both the written and the unwritten law, the written law being made up of formal enactments, while the unwritten law was found in usage and common understanding.

First, there was the written law found in the Conference Minutes of Wesley in England and the Minutes of the American Conferences prior to the organizing Conference of 1784. These contained the basis of many laws and of principles which related to the superintendency; first, that of Wesley in Great Britain, and second, that of the assistants and general assistants in America.

Then, second, there was the written law of the organizing Conference of 1784, which had been worked over by Doctor Coke, Mr. Asbury, and some of the preachers, while they tarried at Mr. Gough's mansion, called Perry Hall, not far from Baltimore, prior to the assembling of the "Christmas Conference" of that year.

In that organizing Conference the whole Book of Discipline was gone over by the Conference and duly adopted.

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The unwritten law has not been without force, even when there was the written law.

In the early period of the Church this was particularly so, but the Methodist Episcopal Church has always had a certain proportion of unwritten law which sometimes preceded the enactment of the written law and sometimes accompanied it.

This unwritten law grew from common consent or understanding or usage.

Part of it was carried over from Mr. Wesley and came down from the beginning of the Church, and part of it grew up as a sort of common law as the Church progressed.

This usage or common law, however, had no force as against a properly enacted written law to the contrary, but it frequently illuminated the written statute, and was regarded as having force when there was no written law to the contrary.

The unwritten law has a bearing upon the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as it has upon various other things in the Church. From it may be gathered information and interpretation, and many things should be viewed in the light of the old usage or common understanding, but generally the appeal must be to the written law.

We turn to the written law, duly enacted from time to time by the law-making body of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to learn what it teaches as to the nature and status of the episcopate in the early years of the Church's history.



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In the first place, we seek the earliest written law of the new Church as to its episcopacy.

The first formal code, commonly called the Discipline, was passed by the organizing Conference, which convened in Baltimore, Maryland, in the last week of December, 1784, but which ran over into January, 1785, and was printed in the latter year. As it was enacted mainly in 1784, it is frequently spoken of as the Discipline of 1784, but, as it appeared in print in the next year, it is sometimes referred to as the Discipline of 1785.

The original title-page termed this legal code a "Form of Discipline," as it said:

"Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America." (Minutes, 1784.)

The enactments in reference to the episcopate which were incorporated in the Book of Discipline from the beginning and down to 1808, will show what the Church intended and understood its episcopacy to be in that early period.

We, therefore, undertake to read the law as it then appeared and to ascertain its meaning.

In this, the first Book of Discipline, containing the action of the organizing Conference of 1784, which was printed in 1785, there is the following in regard to the functions of a superintendent or bishop:

"Q. 26. What is the Office of a Superintendent?

"A. To ordain *Superintendents, Elders*, and

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Deacons; to preside as a Moderator in our Conferences; to fix the Appointments of the Preachers for the several Circuits: and in the Intervals of the Conference, to change, receive, or suspend Preachers, as Necessity may require; and to receive Appeals from the Preachers and People, and decide them.

“N. B. No Person shall be ordained a Superintendent, Elder, or Deacon, without the Consent and Imposition of Hands of a Superintendent, except in the Instance provided for in the 29th Minute.”

What is styled “the 29th Minute” is:

“Q. 29. If by Death, Expulsion, or otherwise there be no Superintendent remaining in our Church, what shall we do?

“A. The Conference shall elect a Superintendent, and the Elders or any three of them shall ordain him according to our Liturgy.”

This is what was to be done in case the Church happened to be without a bishop. Then the line would be started again in the manner just stated.

The answer to the twenty-sixth question set forth the duties, powers, and privileges of a bishop in the first period of the Church's history.

Notice what points were stated in the law and what these points implied.

As a superintendent, the bishop was to superintend whatever that involved. But specifically:

1. The bishops were the chief presiding officers of the Church, and, hence, it was the duty of the bishop to preside in the Conferences.

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2. The setting apart of superintendents or bishops, and the ordination of elders and deacons belonged to the functions of the bishop or bishops, as long as there was a bishop, but, if there was no bishop living, then the elders could act and start the line anew.

3. The bishop had a veto power in the matter of ordination and had power to prevent the ordination of a deacon or elder and even to prevent the consecration of a bishop, for these things could not be done without the consent of a bishop and the imposition of the bishop's hands.

4. It was the function and duty of the bishop "to fix the appointments of the preachers;" that is to say, to assign them to the various charges at Conference time.

5. It was the duty of the bishop, between the Conference sessions, to change and fix the appointments. In other words, he could change and make appointments at any time.

6. Between Conference sessions he could receive preachers.

7. In the intervals between the sessions of the Annual Conference he could suspend preachers, and in all these things he was judge of the necessity of such action.

8. The bishop was the supreme law-officer, and could act as an appellate court, with power not only to hear appeals from the preachers and the people, but also to decide the cases so appealed.

In addition, to supply anything unspecified in the written law, they would naturally turn back

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to what had been carried over from Mr. Wesley and his usages, where the usage had not been specifically or impliedly set aside by formal enactments which had become the law.

Further, this inheritance of usage, or unwritten law, might also come in to illuminate the new legal enactments.

Changes were made from time to time in the formally enacted law in regard to the episcopacy, but the essentials were always preserved.

In the Book of Discipline of 1786 the law is precisely the same as it was in the Discipline of 1784 or 1785, only that the number of the questions is changed from 26 to 25.

In 1787 the Discipline underwent a radical change in its form. Before it was simply a series of questions and answers running from 1 to the end, but, in 1787, though the question and answer method was continued, the book was divided into numbered sections with topical and appropriate headings.

This rearrangement was made by Bishop Asbury, aided by the Rev. John Dickins, but, doubtless, it was revised later by Bishop Coke, and it is interesting to know that it was in this edition of the Discipline that the title bishop was substituted for the word superintendent.

A new part of this book was "Section III.—On the Nature and Constitution of our Church," in which reasons were given for the organization of the new Church. After reciting certain reasons, there followed this statement:

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“For these Reasons, we have thought it our Duty to form ourselves into an Independent Church. And as the most excellent Mode of Church Government according to our maturest Judgment is that of a *moderate Episcopacy*; and as we are persuaded, *that the uninterrupted Succession of Bishops from the Apostles*, can be proved neither from Scripture nor Antiquity; we therefore have constituted ourselves into an *Episcopal Church*, under the direction of *Bishops, Elders, Deacons, and Preachers*, according to the Forms of Ordination annexed to our Prayer Book, and the Regulations laid down in this Form of Discipline.” (A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, etc., New York, 1787, Section III. On the Nature and Constitution of Our Church, p. 6, 3d. edition, 1787.)

So the character of the episcopate is declared to be not in conformity to the notion of apostolic succession—not a high-church, or higher order episcopate—but “that of a *moderate Episcopacy*.”

In 1787 the Discipline shows some change in the language. In this edition, as already stated, the title superintendent is stricken out and the word bishop is substituted, and so we have:

“Section IV. On the Constituting of Bishops, and their Duty.

“*Quest. 1.* How is a Bishop constituted?”

“*Quest. 2.* What is his Duty?”

“*Answ.* To preside as a Moderator in our

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Conferences; to fix the Appointments of the Preachers for the several Circuits; and in the Intervals of the Conference, to change, receive, or suspend Preachers, as Necessity may require; to travel through as many Circuits as he can, and to settle all the Spiritual business of the Societies."

There is a change in the order of the specified powers and duties; there is the insertion of "to travel through as many Circuits as he can," "and to settle all the Spiritual business of the Societies," and there is the elimination of "and to receive appeals from the preachers and people, and decide them."

So the bishop ceased to have the power of a court of appeals, though he did not cease to be a law-officer with power to make decisions on law questions.

He had been a traveling bishop. That custom and duty had been inherited from Wesley, and it was understood to be his duty, but what had been the understanding and the fact was now placed in the formulated written law as though the Church meant to more thoroughly emphasize the duty of the bishop "to travel" far and wide.

There was also a new printed specification as to what was implied in the superintendency, namely, not only to travel, but also "to settle all the spiritual business of the societies." This, of course, was understood to have been done by Wesley, but now it was formally stated in the printed enactment.

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In the same year, 1787, the "N. B." of the first Discipline, "No person shall be ordained . . . without the consent," etc., was taken out, and, while the substance appeared elsewhere, the part requiring the "consent" of the bishop to the consecration of a bishop and the ordination of deacons and elders disappeared.

In 1788 the law as to bishops is essentially the same, but "settle" is changed into "direct"—"to direct in the spiritual business of the societies," and then, there is added, "as also to ordain local preachers," and to this is appended a new note:

"N. B. The Bishop has obtained liberty, by the suffrages of the Conference, to ordain local preachers to the office of deacons, provided they obtain a testimonial from the society," etc.

In 1789 the same law as to the episcopate continues.

In 1791 there is the same, excepting that "as also to ordain local preachers" was stricken out, and there was substituted "as also to ordain Bishops, Elders, and deacons," but the "N. B." as to local preachers was continued.

In 1792 the law appeared in this form:

"*Quest.* 3. What is the Bishop's duty?

"*Answ.* 1. To preside in our Conferences.

"2. To fix the appointments of the Preachers for the several Circuits.

"3. In the intervals of the Conferences, to change, receive, or suspend Preachers, as necessity may require.

"4. To travel through the connexion at large.



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"5. To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the Societies.

"6. To ordain Bishops, Elders, and Deacons." ("Section 14. Of the Election and Consecration of Bishops and of Their Duty," p. 17.)

"As a Moderator" goes out.

"To travel through as many Circuits as he can" becomes "To travel through the connexion at large," a different phrasing, but meaning essentially the same thing. He was not to settle in a particular locality, but to itinerate, and, as far as possible, cover the whole Church.

"To settle all the spiritual business of the Societies" becomes "To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the Societies," making it more comprehensive and, if anything, more specific.

Provision was also made for the trial of an immoral bishop. That had been involved in the amenability of the bishop, but this prescribes the method.

The Discipline of 1792, the eighth edition, had a new section entitled, "General and District Conferences." The General Conference, which was now to meet quadrennially, was to be composed of "All the Travelling Preachers who shall be in full connection at the time of holding the Conference."

There also appeared the following:

"*Quest.* 7. Shall the Bishop be authorized to unite two or more Districts together, where he



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judges it expedient, in order to form a District Conference?

“*Ans.* He shall as far as is consistent with the rule immediately preceding,” which specified that there were to be not fewer than three circuits or more than twelve.

“*Quest.* 8. Who shall appoint the times of holding the District Conferences?

“*Ans.* The Bishop.”

“*Quest.* 11. How are the Districts to be formed?

“*Ans.* According to the judgment of the Bishops.”

Wesley had always named the time for the Conferences to convene, and this principle was followed in America, but now the principle is embedded in the written law and it is specifically stated that the bishop is to appoint the time for holding a Conference.

It is to be remembered that the District Conference of that day was different from the Conference that bears the title at this time. The District Conference of 1792 was the equivalent of the Yearly or Annual Conference of later times.

It was also specified at this time that the bishops were to form the Districts, but, as a matter of fact, they had been forming the Districts prior to this. The enactment put the practice into the written law.

In 1792 there was a section with the title: “Of the Presiding Elders and their Duty,” and, among

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the questions and answers under this head are the following:

*“Quest. 1. By whom are the presiding elders to be chosen?”*

*“Answ. By the bishop.”*

*“Quest. 2. By whom are the presiding elders to be stationed and changed?”*

*“Answ. By the bishop.”*

The bishops had always done this, but now the matter is clearly presented in the written law. It was the function of the bishop to form the Districts, to select the presiding elders, to assign them to the Districts, and to remove them, according to his judgment. These things were implied in the duty of superintendence and in the appointment of the preachers. The presiding elder was a preacher, and, like any other preacher, received his appointment from the bishop, whose power of appointment was recognized by both the written and the unwritten law.

In the Discipline of 1796 there were some very important modifications of the law. The title “Yearly Conferences” takes the place of the designation “District Conferences,” and, under “Sect. III. Of the General and Yearly Conferences,” appear the following interesting questions and answers:

*“Quest. 3. Who shall attend the Yearly Conferences?”*

*“Answ. All the travelling preachers who are in full connection, and those who are to be received into full connection.”*

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*“Quest. 4. Who shall appoint the times of holding the Yearly Conferences?”*

*“Answ. The bishops.”*

Thus the right of the bishops to fix the time for the meeting of the “Yearly Conferences” was explicitly expressed, though the authority to do so had always vested in the bishops.

As a matter of fact, nearly all the points expressed from time to time in the various editions of the Book of Discipline in regard to the bishops had previously existed in the practice, and generally were an unfolding or formal statement of what had been the practice in Wesley’s system of supervision.

In harmony with this view, Bishops Coke and Asbury, in their “Notes to the Discipline,” prepared after the General Conference of 1796, and at the request of that body, say:

“In considering the present subject (The Election and Consecration of Bishops), we must observe that nothing has been introduced into Methodism by the present episcopal form of government which was not before fully exercised by Mr. Wesley. He presided in the Conferences; fixed the appointments of the preachers for their several circuits; changed, received, or suspended preachers wherever he judged that necessity required it; traveled through the European connection at large; superintended the spiritual and temporal business: and consecrated two bishops, Thomas Coke and Alexander Mather, one before the present episcopal plan took place in America,

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and the other afterward, besides ordaining elders and deacons.

“But the authority of Mr. Wesley and that of the bishops in America differ in the following important points:”—and here they recite certain differences which essentially grow out of the difference in nature between the American and the English Conference, but the American system was an embodiment and development of Wesley’s practice.

We should now inquire as to what is stated and implied in and by the written law of 1784 and in the early years of the denomination in regard to the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Summarizing the points already presented, we find:

*First*, that the bishop was the chief presiding officer of the Church, and he was to be the president of the Conferences, whether yearly or general.

*Second*, that the bishop was the interpreter of the law of the Church. As the president of a Conference he was to make rulings as a moderator. As a chief presiding and law-officer of the Church he was to interpret the law and to make decisions, and so he decided questions of law.

*Third*, that one function of the bishop was to perform the rite of ordination of ministers; in other words, that the service of ordination and the work of ordaining belonged to the bishop.

*Fourth*, that it was the province and duty of

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the bishop to fix the appointments of the preachers; that is to say, to make the appointments of the preachers, or to assign the preachers to their work; or, in other words, to determine who should be the pastors of the charges, or what preachers should perform any particular work. That meant that charges should not decide who should be their ministers, and preachers should not determine what particular work they would perform, but that the bishop would be charged with the responsibility of determining or designating in either case. This involved the appointment of presiding elders as well as other preachers, and also involved the transfer of preachers from one Conference to another.

The bishop got his information as to the merits of men and the needs of Churches from the presiding elders, or wherever he could, but his decision was final, and his decision fixed the appointments for both preachers and charges.

*Fifth*, that the bishop was to indicate the charges and form the districts to which the preachers could be assigned. He arranged the work as to the charge, the district, and the Conference.

*Sixth*, that the bishop should not only appoint the preachers at the time of the yearly session of the Conference, but that he would have the right to change the appointments of the preachers, as necessity might require, during the intervals between the yearly sessions of the Conference. The responsibility of assigning the preachers was his at all times, and within his power at any time.

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*Seventh*, that it was the function of the bishop to superintend the work and the workers of the Church. That belonged to his office as a superintendent.

The phrase in the law of 1787 is "to settle all the spiritual business of the Societies," and in 1788 this word "settle" was changed to "direct"—"to direct in the spiritual business of the societies." That implies oversight and authority. If the bishop was to direct, then he had authority to direct.

Later the word "temporal" was inserted, so that the bishop was to direct in "the temporal and spiritual business of the Church." Thus Wesley did, and the bishop was to do as Mr. Wesley had done in this particular.

The episcopacy was a superintendency, and the bishop was to oversee or watch over the Church, to direct and, in a considerable degree, control, and hence he was vested with a measure of authority. Indeed, his very office implied some degree of authority.

*Eighth*, the bishop was to have, not the superintendency of a section of the Church, but the superintendency of the Church generally. He was not to be located in one locality, but he was "to travel" here and there—"to travel at large."

It was not to be a local, but a general superintendency, not one restricted to a limited locality or particular section of the Church.

It was not to be a local or diocesan episcopate with work in a limited section, but one of a gen-

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eral character, with general jurisdiction, so that the bishop might be assigned to or perform his episcopal work in any or every part of the entire Church. His work was not to be local, but general.

*Ninth.* It was an itinerant or traveling episcopacy. It was, as we have seen, not a stationary superintendency fixed over a diocese, district, or a small section with a defined territory, but a general superintendency which covered the whole Church and each and every bishop was for the whole Church and not located or limited to any particular locality.

That implied and necessitated movement from point to point, which might carry the bishop in the discharge of his episcopal duties anywhere or everywhere throughout the entire Church.

That was what Wesley had done, and the superintendents or bishops of the new Church were to do the same, and would have done the same had it not been specified in the statute law. Placing it in the written law, however, emphasized the fact that it was a traveling episcopacy and that the Church was determined to continue it as such.

The law of 1784, which was printed in 1785, gives the first formal enactment as to the itinerant episcopacy. It reads as follows:

“Q. 28. If the *Superintendent* ceases from Traveling at large among the People, shall he still exercise his Office in any Degree?

“A. If he ceases from Traveling without the Consent of the Conference, he shall not thereafter



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exercise any ministerial Function whatsoever in our Church.”

He had to travel at large or cease to be recognized not only as a superintendent, but also as a minister of any sort in the Church. By ceasing to itinerate as a general superintendent he suspended himself. Thus was general oversight over the Church emphasized, and also the character of the episcopacy as a general and not a local itinerancy.

In 1786 the law was the same. In 1787 it was the same, only that the title bishop was substituted for superintendent. It remained the same down to 1792, when it was made to read, “If he cease from traveling” (at large), and the word general was inserted before Conference, so that the answer became, “If he cease from traveling without the consent of the General Conference,” etc. The General Conference meeting once in four years had now become a fixed institution, and hence the insertion of the title. In 1804 the latter part of the law was changed to, “he shall not hereafter exercise the episcopal office in our Church,” so that if a bishop did cease from traveling at large, he suspended his episcopal functions but might continue to act as a minister. In 1808 the law was the same as in 1804.

It was an itinerant or traveling episcopacy or general superintendency which was not fixed in a section of the Church, but which required traveling anywhere and everywhere throughout the work and involved general supervision.



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Even the bishop had no fixed residence, but lived where he pleased and held himself in readiness for episcopal service anywhere.

The fact that a bishop might render service anywhere in the Church required and necessitated a moveable, mobile, or itinerant episcopacy.

*Tenth.* The arrangement of the episcopal work belonged to the bishops. This was part of the episcopal discretion that went with the office.

The bishops decided where, when, and how they would go, and how they would superintend.

The General Conference or the Annual Conference did not undertake to direct the bishops in the work of presiding, planning, superintending, or traveling, for these matters inhered in the episcopacy.

How and when the bishops would work out the details of their episcopal duty was a matter for the bishops themselves to arrange.

From the beginning these were things the bishops themselves decided.

The very nature of the general episcopacy required liberty of motion and action on the part of the bishop. As his work was general, he must have power to go generally and freely. As it was his duty to travel generally, he must travel at will and according to his judgment. So in regard to other episcopal actions such an officer must have freedom, and because of these facts, from the very beginning the bishop had large discretion.

The General Conference did not direct the bishops in these functions, for in the very consti-

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tution of the Church they were essential to the episcopacy.

*Eleventh.* The episcopate was a joint superintendency in which all the bishops were equals—equal in rank and equal in authority.

The principle was enunciated in Wesley's circular letter, which was presented to the organizing Conference. In this letter Wesley said, "I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America," and that principle was accepted and became an essential part of the episcopacy and a part of the organic law.

Bishop Asbury at one time tried to have assistant bishops elected, but the effort failed. The Conferences wanted each bishop to be the equal of every other bishop.

When, as in the very early days, there were but a few bishops, and only a few Annual Conferences, sometimes two bishops went together to the Conferences when in session.

They traveled together or separately. Sometimes Bishop Coke and Bishop Asbury attended the same Conference. Sometimes only one was present. When Coke and Asbury were the only bishops and Coke was out of the country, Bishop Asbury presided as though he was the only bishop of the Church, and, as a matter of fact, the one bishop in his presidency had as much authority as all the bishops could have had.

Bangs, in his history, mentions how that Bishop Asbury and Bishop Whatcoat in 1802

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traveled together part of the way and held Conferences together and then separated, and separately traveled in different directions holding Conferences and acting independently, and later, by common arrangement, meeting again at a remote point, and that this was planned so "that they might not interfere with each other, nor both travel over the same ground." (Bangs, "Hist. of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. II, p. 135.)

Dr. Bangs says: "In imitation of the primitive evangelists, these bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church itinerated through the extent of the work, East, West, North, and South, not neglecting the remotest settlements in the wilderness. And that they might not interfere with each other, nor both travel over the same ground, we find them in the latter part of last year, after holding a council with some of their brethren, determining to meet the Virginia Conference, and from thence accompany each other as far as the New York Conference; after which one was to continue East to superintend the Conferences in that direction, visiting all the Eastern and Northern States, and on through the western section of New York State to Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and thence through the districts of Virginia, until he met his colleague at the Virginia Conference; the bishop who took the Western tour was to pass on into the Western States and Territories, through Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and so meet as before stated, in the center of the work in Virginia." (Nathan

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Bangs, D. D., "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, ed. 1853, Vol. II, pp. 134, 135.)

This was an early Bishops' Conference and a specimen of the early division of the episcopal work.

When there was only one bishop, he had all the episcopal power and all the episcopal responsibility in himself.

When there were a number of bishops, each bishop was equal to any other and in his jurisdiction to all others. Two might be in the same Conference, or one might be by himself.

When Conferences greatly multiplied and distances greatly increased, a division of labor was necessitated. Still each bishop was equal to any other bishop, but the bishop actually in charge of the Conference became the responsible bishop for that Conference, and therefore, and necessarily, became and was supreme in his assignment.

All together might assign one bishop to a given work, but all could not control one in the field which he administered.

Another bishop, or all the other bishops, could not make appointments in his Conference, though he might counsel with one bishop or any number of bishops.

No other bishop, or all the other bishops, could transfer a preacher into his Conference without his consent, and one bishop could not transfer a preacher into another bishop's Confer-

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ence without the consent of the particular bishop in charge of that Conference.

No other bishop, or all the bishops together, could review, revise, or pass upon his work of administration. He was the equal of any other bishop or of all other bishops in administration, for they were joint superintendents.

The work was general and any bishop might have duty anywhere in the Church, but there had to be an understanding between the bishops as to the division of the work.

*Twelfth.* It was an episcopacy with bishops superintending, but not of irresponsible bishops. The bishops were amenable to the Conference for their conduct.

The first Book of Discipline—that of 1784-5—had the following:

“*Quest.* 4. To whom is the bishop amenable for his conduct?

“*Ans.* To the Conference, who have power to expel him for improper conduct, if they see it necessary.”

The Conference, at that time, meant the whole body of the ministry.

In these early days the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church did just about what Wesley had done.

He presided over Conferences; they presided over Conferences:

He fixed the appointments of the preachers; they fixed the appointment of the preachers:

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He received preachers; they received preachers:

He ordained; they ordained:

He superintended; they superintended:

He superintended the whole body; they superintended throughout the entire Church:

He was not restricted to a locality; they were not limited to a section:

He traveled throughout the work; they traveled and superintended not locally, but generally:

He administered the affairs of his organization; they directed the business of the Church.

There were, however, one or two marked differences. Wesley's Conferences were not voting bodies and Wesley was supreme, while in the new Methodist Episcopal Church the Conference was a voting and deciding body, and the bishops were elected by the Conference which also made the laws, and to it the bishops, under the organic law, were amenable.

To recapitulate, the inherent essentials of the episcopate were the presidency of the Conferences with all that implied, the ordination of ministers, the fixing of the appointments, the arrangement of the work, the direction of the business of the Church, the interpretation and execution of the laws, and the unlocalized and itinerant superintendency covering the entire Church.

In those early days efforts were made to make changes, and even radical changes, in the system, but the Church from 1784 to 1808 absolutely re-

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fused to make any change in the plan of the itinerant general episcopacy.

The most conspicuous efforts to change the essential character we now will mention.

It has been stated that, in 1786, Bishop Asbury "proposed to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, Mr. T., Mr. W., and Mr. A., as three persons to be appointed bishops for the United States, to act under Mr. Asbury," and that Wesley replied to this purport, "During my life there shall be no archbishops for the Methodist Church, but send me the man of your choice and I shall have him appointed joint superintendent with you." (Edward J. Drinkhouse, D. D., "History of Methodist Reform," Baltimore, 1898, Vol. I, p. 480, quoted from McCaine's "History and Mystery.")

An effort was made by Bishop Asbury, in 1797, to have bishops of different grades, by inducing the Conferences to create assistant bishops, but this attempt utterly failed.

This is the story: In 1797 a Conference met in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, on the nineteenth of September. In a letter to this Conference, Asbury "proposed the appointment of Jesse Lee, Richard Whatcoat, and Francis Poythress as 'assistant bishops.' Asbury knew what he meant, and his meaning was plain enough. He was to be chief, not among equals, but among assistants. He did not consent to be chief among equals until the election, in 1800, of Whatcoat as bishop." (Edward J. Drinkhouse, D. D., "History of



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Methodist Reform," Baltimore, 1898, Vol. I, p. 479.)

Dr. Drinkhouse remarks, "The names he proposed were judiciously chosen; Lee for the Northeast, Whatcoat for the East, and Poythress for the Southwest; each swayed a commanding influence in his section." (Drinkhouse, "History of Methodist Reform," p. 481.)

On September 12, 1797, Asbury wrote to Jesse Lee, appointing him to preside over the New England Conference at Wilbraham, as his own health had been impaired.

In this letter Bishop Asbury said: "The burden lieth on thee; act with a wise and tender hand, especially on the stations. I hope it will force the Connection to do something, and turn their attention for one to assist or substitute me. I can not express the distress I have had in all my afflictions, for the state of the Connection. We say the Lord will provide. True; but we must look out for men and means. Your brethren in Virginia wish you to come forth. I think the most general and impartial election may take place in the Yearly Conferences; every one may vote; and in General Conference, perhaps one-fifth or one-sixth part would be absent. I wish you to come and keep as close to me and my directions as you can. I wish you to go after the Conference to Georgia, Holston, and to Kentucky; and perhaps to come to Baltimore in June, if the ordination should take place, and to come on to the Eastern Conference. You will have to follow my ad-



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vice for your health, steel as you are." (Quoted in Bishop McTyeire, "History of Methodism," Nashville, ed. 1888, p. 469.)

So Jesse Lee presided at the New England Conference which met at Wilbraham in 1797, and, by the appointment of Bishop Asbury, assigned the preachers as might have been done by Asbury, or as might have been done by himself had he been a bishop.

Bangs, however, says that Bishop Asbury "wrote to Jesse Lee, requesting him to attend the Conference in Wilbraham, which he did, and the Conference made choice of him to preside over their deliberations." (Bangs, "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, ed. 1853, p. 61.)

As to the proposition for assistant bishops, which was presented to the New England Conference at Wilbraham, Doctor Abel Stevens says: "Asbury had sent to the Conference a communication, proposing the appointment of Lee and two others (Whatcoat and Poythress) as assistant bishops; they (the members of the Conference) declined it as being incompatible with the requirements of the Discipline." (Dr. Abel Stevens, "Memorials of Methodism," Boston, 1848, p. 383.)

Apparently as a compromise, Dr. Stevens says, "At the close of the session they gave Lee a certificate signifying their wish that he (Jesse Lee) would 'travel with the bishop and fill his appointments when the latter could not be present.'" (Dr. Abel Stevens, "Memorials of Methodism,"

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Boston, 1848, p. 384. See "Lee's Mem.," chap. xiv.)

Dr. Drinkhouse remarks that "Conjecture is legitimate as to what he would have further done had the Wilbraham brethren approved his plan. He would have carried it, armed with their action as a precedent, to all the other six Conferences, and, winning them to it, it is an open question whether he would have ventured to 'set them apart,' or held them over to the General Conference of 1800. . . .

"He did not offer his plan at any other Conference. It did not fall in with the humor of the preachers, and to press it might prove another cause of serious contention, so he dropped it." (Drinkhouse, "History of Methodist Reform," Baltimore, Vol. I, p. 482.)

Asbury letter to Lee shows what he would have done, namely: have the elections in the successive Yearly Conference, and if the three assistant bishops were elected in and by the Yearly Conferences, to have them consecrated in "Baltimore in June" next. (McTyeire, "History of Methodism," Nashville, ed. 1888, p. 469.)

All efforts to have bishops of different grades ended with the General Conference of 1800. The General Conference of 1800 decided to elect one bishop, and before electing him the General Conference determined his status as a joint superintendent and equal in rank to Bishop Asbury.

On Friday morning, May the ninth, John

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McClaskey, of the Philadelphia Conference, moved that,

“Whereas, by a vote of the Conference it is determined that another bishop shall be elected,

“Resolved, That the Conference determine before the votes be canvassed, the powers of the new bishop, whether he shall be equal to Bishop Asbury, or subordinate to him.”

This, however, “was withdrawn by consent.” (General Conference Journal, 1800, p. 35.)

On Saturday afternoon, before the Monday on which the General Conference of 1800 voted for a new bishop,

“Brother Mansfield moved, that the bishops shall have full and equal jurisdiction in all and every respect whatsoever.

“That each and every bishop shall attend each and every Conference, and then and there mutually preside, and station the preachers: *provided*, that in case they should unavoidably be prevented from all attending, the bishop or bishops then present shall be competent to discharge the duties of the office as fully and effectually, in every respect, as if they were all present.

“That at each and every Conference the bishops present shall mutually determine and agree upon their several different routes to the ensuing Conference.”

These propositions were “negatived,” as the Journal phrases it. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1800, p. 36.)

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That such resolutions were presented does not seem very remarkable when we remember that if they elected a new bishop he would be the first elected since those originally designated by Mr. Wesley, and questions as to rank or precedence might arise.

The defeat of the propositions was very significant.

As to the first declaration as to "full and equal jurisdiction," the episcopacy at the very beginning had been established as a joint superintendency and the bishops were "joint superintendents."

Though joint and equal in the episcopate, that did not require the presence of all the bishops and a mutual presidency at each and every Conference, and, being equal in authority, the presidency of one bishop had as much authority as that of all would have; besides, the attempt of several or many to "preside and station the preachers" at one time would tend to conflict and confusion in the episcopal administration.

The third point, directing and determining how the bishops should determine their tours, was touching a matter that inhered in the episcopate and was a matter for the equal bishops to arrange for and by themselves.

So the General Conference rejected these propositions.

On Monday morning, May 12, 1800, the General Conference "proceeded to the election of a bishop."

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The first ballot was a tie between Richard Whatcoat and Jesse Lee.

“Upon the second, there were fifty-nine votes for Brother Richard Whatcoat and fifty-five for Brother Jesse Lee, and one blank; the whole number of voters being one hundred and fifteen: whereupon Brother Richard Whatcoat was declared duly elected.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1800, p. 37.)

He was elected a joint superintendent with Bishop Asbury, just as Coke and Asbury had been joint superintendents.

The law as to the bishop in 1804 is the same as in 1800, only that 2 is amplified into:

“2. To fix the appointments of the preachers for the several circuits, provided he shall not allow any preacher to remain in the same station more than two years successively; excepting the presiding elders, the editor and general book steward, the assistant editor and general book steward, the supernumerary, superannuated and worn-out preachers.”

This was the first time the law placed any limit on the pastoral appointment.

To number 3 was added, “and as the Discipline directs,” so that it read:

“3. In the intervals of the Conferences, to change, receive, and suspend preachers, as necessity may require and as the Discipline directs.”

The Church did not intend that a bishop should have a diocese, or a section of the Church, with

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fixed boundaries of any sort, either permanent or temporary.

At a very early day a suggestion was made to bisect the then territory of the Church, and the suggestion came from no less a personage than Bishop Coke.

Bishop Coke had frequently gone out of the country and much of his time he was in England, to which, it was said, he had been "lent for a season," not to be a bishop there, but to render service of various kinds.

On one of these visits to Great Britain he married a lady of independent means who was deeply devoted to the cause of Christ and His Church. (Bangs, "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, Vol. II, p. 179.)

This, added to his own fortune, increased his power to do good, and made it easier for him to settle down in one country.

About this time Bishop Coke wrote a letter to the American brethren proposing to come back to the United States and to become a resident of the country, and devote himself entirely to the work in America, "on the condition that the continent should be divided into two parts, one of which to be under his superintendency, and the other under the superintendency of Bishop Asbury." (Bangs' Hist., II, p. 179.)

Or, as another historian puts it: "Dr. Coke addressed a circular to his American brethren in June, 1805, announcing his marriage, and proposing to reside permanently with them 'on the

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express condition that the seven Conferences should be divided betwixt us [Bishop Asbury and himself], three and four, and four and three, each of us changing our division annually; and that this plan, at all events, should continue permanent and unalterable during both our lives.' " (McTyeire, "Hist. of Methodism," p. 515.)

Dr. Bangs tells us that

"This proposition was submitted to the several Annual Conferences, and an answer was returned to the doctor congratulating him on his happy marriage, but declining to accept of his proposal for a division of the work in this country according to his request, referring, however, the final decision of the question to the next General Conference." (Bangs's Hist., II, p. 179.)

Bishop McTyeire says,

"The Conferences—some sharply, others mildly but firmly—declined" the proposition. (McTyeire's Hist., p. 515.)

This was not a proposition to give the same bishop the same section for his lifetime, or even for four years, but to divide the territory, or to divide the seven existing Conferences into two groups, three and four or four and three Conferences, and for Bishop Coke to take one and Bishop Asbury the other, and for the bishops to alternate each year; that is to say, there were to be fixed sections with alternating bishops.

A very mild suggestion, it might be said, but when it was submitted to the several Annual Con-



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ferences they all rejected it, and some with great emphasis.

The Church would not tolerate any division of the territory of the Church into such, or any other district arrangement.

The next General Conference took action that obviated any further consideration of this proposition to divide the territory of the Church into districts.

As Bishop Coke had absented himself in a foreign country and was serving another ecclesiastical body, the General Conference adopted the following:

“1st. *Resolved*, That the General Conference do agree and consent that Dr. Coke may continue in Europe till he be called to the United States by the General Conference, or by all the Annual Conferences respectively.

“2d. *Resolved*, That we retain a grateful remembrance of the services and labors of Dr. Coke among us, and the thanks of this Conference are hereby acknowledged to him, and to God, for all his labors of love toward us, from the time he first left his native country to serve us.

“3d. *Resolved*, That Doctor Coke’s name shall be retained on our Minutes after the name of the bishops in a N. B.—‘Doctor Coke, at the request of the British Conference and by the consent of the General Conference, resides in Europe;’ he is not to exercise the office of superintendent or bishop among us in the United States until he be recalled by the General Conference, or by all



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the Annual Conferences respectively.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, pp. 75, 76.)

Bishop Coke had rendered incalculable service to the Methodist Episcopal Church at its organization and through the development of its early years, but, though the General Conference greatly appreciated its first bishop, and gratefully remembered his most valuable service, it would not gratify even him by dividing the Church into districts and it would not permit him to exercise episcopal authority in the United States when he was in a foreign country.

In 1808 an effort was made to create a diocesan or localized episcopacy of another form by electing one bishop for each Conference, and allowing Bishop Asbury to be a general superintendent. That would have been practically a diocesan episcopacy with an archbishop. Of course, when he died the local episcopacy was to remain, there would be no general bishop, and it was not proposed that he would have any successor in the general superintendency. This proposition also failed.

In the General Conference of 1808, on Tuesday afternoon, May 10th, it was moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by John Pitts, both of the Baltimore Conference, “that one person be elected and ordained as joint superintendent or bishop with Bishop Asbury.”

Daniel Ostrander, of the New York Conference, seconded by Joshua Soule, of the New England, moved to amend so that it would read

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that two persons be elected. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, p. 79.)

Then John McClaskey, of the Philadelphia Conference, seconded by Ezekiel Cooper, originally of the Philadelphia, but then of the New York Conference, moved another amendment, namely, "that seven be added to the superintendency." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, p. 80.)

On Wednesday, May 11th, the record states there were "continued the debates on the superintendency," and, on Thursday morning, the 12th, the only record of business is in the words: "Continued the debates on the superintendency," showing that the discussion on the subject of the episcopacy was a lengthy one. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, p. 80.)

On the afternoon of that day, the 12th of May, "Brother McClaskey and Brother Cooper asked leave to withdraw the motion for seven additional bishops, which was refused." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, p. 80.)

The proposition for seven bishops of the kind intended had been badly battered and become hopeless when a strong and skilled debater like Ezekiel Cooper wanted to give up the battle, and evidently there was a strong determination among its opponents to kill the idea of a bishop for a Conference by a decisive vote and to make it a matter of record, for "Brother George Pickering moved, and (the motion) was seconded by Brother Joshua Soule, that the Conference decide on the motion now before them, whether there shall be

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seven additional bishops or not," and their motion was "carried" (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, p. 80), whereupon "Brother McClaskey's motion for seven additional bishops, being put to vote, was lost." Then the motion for two additional bishops was defeated, and the motion for one additional bishop was adopted.

The Conference, with one hundred and twenty-eight members present, at once proceeded to vote for one new bishop, and William McKendree, having received ninety-five votes, was duly elected.

Bangs, referring to the other votes, says, "I believe they were divided between Ezekiel Cooper and Jesse Lee, the former having twenty-eight votes in his favor." (Bangs, "Hist. of Methodist Episcopal Church," footnote, Vol. II, p. 235.)

Ezekiel Cooper and Jesse Lee had been the favorites for the office, but "On the first Sabbath morning of Conference, McKendree, who was looked upon as a backwoodsman, was appointed to preach. Lee and Cooper were the favorite candidates for the bishopric, but now occurred one of those crises in human affairs impossible of anticipation. McKendree had been steadily growing in power and influence, and was known as a rigid disciplinarian, and the staunchest supporter of Asbury's extremest measures. He had faced about since 1792, and displayed a bigoted zeal in building the things he once destroyed. Six feet in stature, finely proportioned, with kindling blue eyes and an intellectual face, clothed in home-

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spun, he stood before his congregation all alive to the issues of the hour. Bangs, who was present, gives an extravagant description of the sermon. Boehm, who was also present, says: 'This was the eloquent sermon that made him bishop. Slow in his commencement, he rose with his subject till his audience was melted like wax before the fire.' Four days afterward he was elected bishop by 95 votes out of 128." (Edward J. Drinkhouse, D. D., "History of Methodist Reform," Baltimore, Vol. I, p. 511.)

Bangs says: "Though personally unknown to most of the younger members of the Conference, yet a sermon which he delivered in the Light Street Church on the Sabbath morning previously to the day of his election had such an effect on the minds of all present, that they seemed to say, with one accord, 'This is the man of our choice, whom God hath appointed to rule over us.' He was accordingly elected and consecrated as before related; and his subsequent life and conduct prove that the choice fell upon the right man, though his administration was often subjected to the severest test and most critical survey." (Nathan Bangs, D. D., "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, Vol. II, p. 238.)

Other things, however, favored William McKendree. In the first place, he had great strength of character; for years he had been a presiding elder in the Western Conference; he had greatly aided Bishop Asbury and traveled with him, he helped the bishop to make the appointments of

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the preachers when the bishop was in feeble health, and, in 1804, there being no bishop present at the Western Conference, William McKendree was elected to preside and he performed his duties admirably. Such things as these also made him widely known and gave him a good standing in the esteem of his brethren.

Bishop McTyeire tells us that "Ezekiel Cooper labored hard to have seven bishops—one for each Annual Conference." (Holland N. McTyeire, D. D., "History of Methodism," Nashville, Tenn., p. 512.))

Doctor Nathan Bangs, who was a member of that General Conference, says:

"A resolution passed the Conference on the twelfth day of its session for the election and consecration of an additional bishop. Before, however, this motion prevailed, a motion for the election of seven additional bishops, one for each Annual Conference, with Bishop Asbury at their head, was largely and ably discussed by some of the leading members of the Conference on each side. Those, however, who were in favor of this motion, were also in favor of either abolishing or greatly restricting the office of presiding elder, and making the episcopacy so large as in a great measure to supersede the necessity of that office. But as it was finally settled by a large majority of the Conference that this officer should be continued in the Church, and likewise continue to be appointed by the bishop, so the motion for adding seven additional bishops, notwithstanding the

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plausibility with which the measure was urged upon the Conference, was finally rejected by a strong vote." (Nathan Bangs, D. D., "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, 1838, Vol. II, p. 235.)

The Church showed that it would not have localized or districted bishops, as it had previously shown that it would not have assistant bishops.

So the episcopacy came down into 1808 a general episcopacy not localized, but for the whole Church, with bishops who traveled at large throughout the entire Church, and among whom there was a parity, so that each bishop was the equal of any and every other bishop.

The changes made in the law as it related to the episcopate from 1784 to 1808 were not numerous and made no change in the essential nature of the episcopacy.

The episcopacy had the same essential characteristics all the way down from its inauguration in 1784 to the General Conference of 1808.

It was an episcopacy not limited to sections, but of a general character, each bishop rendering service generally throughout the Church and itinerating here and there, overseeing the work and the workers, while associated with this episcopacy was the presiding eldership, which furnished the local supervision which supplemented and supported the general superintendency of the bishops and which was so closely related that it

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was regarded as a sort of sub-episcopate or as an auxiliary of the episcopacy.

It was an episcopacy which was not localized, but general; not fixed, but itinerant; and an episcopacy that had no differences of grade, but where there was parity among the bishops, each bishop in his jurisdiction being the equal of any and of all the bishops.

The bishop was a superintendent of the Church generally and could act as a bishop throughout the entire territory of the Church. He was a traveling or itinerant bishop, without a fixed see or section to which he was limited always or even for a term of years.

The bishop was burdened with responsibilities. He was to oversee, and to oversee for the purpose of directing, and that he might effectively direct he was clothed with corresponding authority.

With the general superintendence, there were various details and specific duties.

To condense, the following may be given as a summary of the functions of a bishop down to and into 1808. It was the duty of the bishop:

To preside over the Conferences;

To fix the appointments at Conference time;

To change appointments during the interval between Conferences;

To consecrate bishops and ordain elders and deacons;

To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the societies or Churches;



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To form the presiding elders' districts;  
To arrange the charges and the work generally,  
grouping the charges and the preachers;  
To travel through the Church at large;  
To rule upon questions of law;  
And to execute the laws made from time to  
time.

All these things came down to 1808 and inhered  
in the episcopacy at the time of the General Con-  
ference in that year.



CHAPTER X

THE EPISCOPATE AND THE ORGANIC  
LAW



## CHAPTER X

### THE EPISCOPATE AND THE ORGANIC LAW

THE supervisional characteristics of the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church came down from Wesley and his methods.

In that sense this episcopacy was older than the reorganized American Methodism when it became a complete Church in seventeen hundred and eighty-four.

Its very essence was in the lifeblood of the organism from its beginning with and under the Reverend John Wesley, so that, to understand its spirit and its essential characteristics, one must always look back to that beginning and follow the stream from its source.

This episcopacy connecting with the system of the Reverend John Wesley, but more formally instituted in 1784, though slightly modified in the course of years, came down, with its nature and methods essentially the same, into the year 1808.

In that year occurred an event which was to have a marked influence in perpetuating this kind of episcopacy.

In that historic year the Church imbedded this peculiar episcopacy in its organic law, and placed it beyond the power of even the Church itself,

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under a sudden or momentary impulse, to destroy or modify the episcopacy as it had come down from the beginning into the year 1808, and this incorporation in the organic law was deliberately made to preserve this episcopacy and to prevent any hasty change therein.

The General Conference which convened in 1808 was one of the most notable General Conferences the Church has ever held, and that mainly for one thing which it did, namely, the change which it brought about in the character and power of the quadrennial General Conference.

Up to this year, and including the General Conference of 1808, the General Conference was general in the sense that it was made up of the ministry generally, and was essentially the combined ministry, or, so to speak, the combined membership of the Annual Conferences assembled at one time and in one place. In other words, all members of the Annual Conferences who had traveled as itinerant preachers for four years were entitled to membership in this united body, which met once in four years. Briefly speaking, it was the body of the eldership.

This general General Conference, which contained the body of the ministry, and which was the assembly of all the Annual Conferences, possessed all authority in and over the ecclesiastical body called the Methodist Episcopal Church. It could make any enactment, decide any question, and issue any order, but it was in danger of becoming too bulky and unwieldy, and because of

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matters incident to its composition, there was the possibility of its becoming an inequitable body, because it might not equally distribute the representation of the several Annual Conferences; or have in it an equitable number from each Annual Conference.

The country was enlarging, the Church was spreading, and the distances between the extremes were increasing.

It was becoming inconvenient and impracticable to bring all the preachers together. To bring them to any given place meant steadily increasing expense, and if they did come together the long absences of the remote members of the body meant a check in the progress of the Church and a positive loss to the work.

More than that, not only was the General Conference destined to become too large, but its representation would become more inequitable because the large Conferences would have an advantage over the smaller ones, and those close to the seat of the General Conference would have a decided advantage over the Annual Conferences which were remote, as a larger proportionate number of their members could more easily attend the sessions.

So there came suggestions to change the composition of the General Conference by changing the principle of membership, by having a General Conference that would no longer be the combined Annual Conferences, or the massed ministry assembled at one time in one place.

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To carry out this idea it was proposed to create a General Conference that would contain a proportionate representation of the body of the ministry, the members of the General Conference being selected in and by the Annual Conferences in proportion to the number of ministers in these Conferences.

Then the body of the ministry, no matter where the ministers might be located, would have a proportionate and equal representation in the quadrennial body, and there would be no disadvantage from distance and no special advantage from proximity to the seat of the General Conference, no matter where that might be.

The General Conference of 1808, which by its very nature and by the recognition of the Church had full power in this matter, decided to change the general General Conference, or body of the ministry jointly assembled, into a delegated General Conference which also should meet quadrennially.

So after the general General Conference of 1808, the General Conference was to be a delegated body with delegates in proportion to the number of members in the Annual Conferences. In this way every preacher in full membership in an Annual Conference was sure to be represented.

That there might be no misunderstanding as to the nature and powers of this new kind of a General Conference, the General Conference of 1808 drew up a written document which defined

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the nature and composition of the delegated General Conference, setting forth its proportionate representation and specifying the powers of the delegated body.

This written document was adopted by the general General Conference of 1808, and it became the written Constitution of the Church, and particularly of subsequent General Conferences.

After specifying the composition and other matters relating to the new kind of General Conference, the Constitution of 1808 empowered the delegated General Conference which it brought into existence.

The empowering clause seems very broad, for it declares that the delegated quadrennial General Conference "shall have full power to make rules and regulations for the Church," but, as a matter of fact, it diminished the power of the new General Conference as compared with the old style of General Conference, which came down to and included that of 1808.

In 1808, and prior thereto, the General Conference was the supreme power in the Church and could, by and of itself, do whatever it deemed best for the Church, even to the making and mending of the Constitution of the Church.

The old General Conference could create a new Constitution and a new kind of General Conference, but the new kind of General Conference could not of itself and by itself do such things.

The old General Conference could do these

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things because of its very nature, for it was the assembled body of the ministry, but the new kind of General Conference was not the assembled body of the ministry, but a representative body, made up of delegates selected from the body of the ministry which now remained in the Annual Conferences and which no longer could come together as a body in the General Conference.

The whole Church, including the ministry and the laity, had conceded the sovereign power to the body of the ministry and to that body assembled in General Conference, and that sovereign power vested in the General Conference of eighteen hundred and eight. It had, therefore, the right to make a new General Conference, but the new or delegated General Conference did not possess the primary power of the old or general General Conference because it was not the assembled body of the ministry.

The power of the delegated General Conference was, therefore, diminished by the new arrangement, first, in the matter of constitution making and mending. This power essentially belonged to the sovereign authority of the Church, namely, to the body of the ministry in the Annual Conferences, and, as the body of the ministry no longer would come together in the General Conference, the body of the ministry retained that power in the Annual Conferences.

Ultimately, the constitution making and mending power was divided, by the General Conference of 1808, between the General Conference on the



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one hand and the Annual Conferences on the other.

So, in this particular, the delegated General Conference did not have power equal to that of the General Conference of 1808 or of General Conferences prior to that date, for the new General Conference could not of itself change the Constitution.

Not only did the delegated General Conference have diminished power in this particular, but also it had diminished power in making laws and in other exercises of authority.

The General Conference, it is true, continued to be the only law-making body in the Church, but the new kind of General Conference was limited as a law-maker by certain restrictions which the Constitution placed upon it, for, while the delegated General Conference was given "full power to make rules and regulations for the Church," the Constitution added, "under the following limitations and restrictions," and there followed certain specific restrictions or limitations upon the power of the delegated General Conference.

The consequence was that the new kind of General Conference had diminished power and could not do all that the old General Conference down to and including that of 1808 could have done.

These specified limitations have been commonly called "The Six Restrictive Rules," for they are six in number, and they restricted the General Conference.

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These specified restrictions were intended to protect certain things which were deemed of vital importance to the ecclesiastical organism, and to prevent the General Conference from changing or in any way interfering with what was thus protected by the stated limitations.

For example, the General Conference was not permitted to modify the Articles of Religion, or in any way to change the Doctrines of the Church. It could not divert the income of the Publishing House from "The benefit of the Traveling, Supernumerary, and Superannuated Preachers, their wives, widows, and children."

The General Conference could not change what may be called the Bill of Rights, so as to take from accused ministers and members the right of trial and appeal.

What is more, the Constitution put it beyond the power of the delegated General Conference to make any change in the episcopacy as it had come down to and existed at the time of the General Conference of 1808.

By the act of that General Conference the kind of episcopacy that existed in 1808 was incorporated in the Constitution of the Church and was thus placed beyond the power of the delegated General Conference to abrogate, to impair, or to change in any particular or in any degree, directly or indirectly.

One of the limitations which the Constitution of 1808 placed on the powers of the delegated General Conference related to the episcopacy.

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This limitation is the third, commonly called the Third Restrictive Rule.

It read: "They [the General Conference] shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy, nor destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

This embedded this episcopacy in the written Constitution of the Church and put the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of 1808, beyond the control of the delegated General Conference, and, as long as that feature of the Constitution endured, the General Conference could not change the episcopacy from what it was when the Constitution was adopted.

By this limitation the delegated General Conference was restricted in this particular so that it did not have "full power to make rules and regulations" as to the episcopacy, any more than it had full power over the Articles of Religion.

It had full power as to many things, but not as to the episcopacy.

In the first place, under the Constitution the General Conference can not "do away episcopacy." It can not destroy or discard episcopacy in whole or in part.

Episcopacy is one thing the General Conference can not do away with. It can not destroy, disuse, or diminish the episcopacy. It can not destroy, disuse, or diminish any part of it or all of it, or in any degree.

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An interpretation of this constitutional restriction is not difficult, if the interpreter knows what the episcopacy was prior and down to the adoption of the Constitution of 1808.

What it was at that time was put beyond the power of the new kind of General Conference, namely, the delegated General Conference, to destroy, to modify, or to interfere with, or to disuse. The Constitution was intended to preserve intact the episcopacy of the Church at that time, so that the delegated General Conference could never change it.

This episcopacy had peculiarities which it was desired and intended should be preserved without modification.

The wording of the Constitution indicates the special nature of this episcopacy.

The descriptive phrases in the third restrictive rule are very suggestive and worthy of careful study. Notice some of them:

The "episcopacy" is a "superintendency."

The quaint phrasing is that the General Conference shall not "do away episcopacy."

As the law reads:

"The General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy."

It can not destroy, neutralize, change, or disuse anything that would destroy or "do away episcopacy."

It can not destroy it directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, or immediately or remotely.

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The General Conference can not change anything in any part of the polity, or to use the language of the Constitution, "any part or rule of our government," that would in any way destroy, or tend to destroy, the episcopacy of the Church.

Neither can the General Conference "do away" with the kind of episcopacy which the Methodist Episcopal Church had at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of 1808.

That peculiar kind was a "General Superintendency," not a local, but a general superintendency—not limited to a section, but for the whole Church—anywhere and everywhere.

Further, it was not any or every possible sort of general superintendency, but "our" "general superintendency"—not what others had or might have—or what some individual might wish or prefer to have—but "our" "general superintendency"—the peculiar kind of general superintendency which the Methodist Episcopal Church had had, and had at that very time, namely, at the time of the General Conference of 1808.

The restrictive rule specifies one of the marked peculiarities of that general superintendency, namely, that it was not one with the bishop fixed in a given place, but with bishops who traveled throughout the whole Church, as the rule read, "our itinerant general superintendency."

That is, with bishops who are not located at any fixed point, but who travel from place to place over the work generally—not with bishops who have an oversight, or even a general over-

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sight, but so limited that they can not be anywhere and everywhere, but must be tied down to one section; but who are bishops with actual or possible work anywhere and everywhere; in other words, an "itinerant general superintendency," where the bishops, being elected by the whole Church and for the whole Church, "travel through the connection at large."

It is an itinerant or traveling superintendency and not a restricted itinerant superintendency, but a superintendency that is general as well as itinerant.

Again, the law is exceedingly specific. It is not any other "itinerant general superintendency," in existence elsewhere, or possible somewhere, but "our itinerant general superintendency"—the kind the Methodist Episcopal Church actually had at that date, namely, in the year 1808. That is to say, one in which the bishop can not be tied down to one limited locality, so that he can not go and render episcopal service somewhere else, or anywhere else, within the bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The General Conference, therefore, can not destroy episcopacy, the general superintendency of the bishops, or "our itinerant general superintendency," as it was in 1808. That must continue as far as the power of the General Conference is concerned.

The constitutional restriction is still more specific. The General Conference can not destroy, change, neutralize, or disuse the "itinerant gen-

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eral superintendency" as it was in 1808, but, more than that, it must maintain the very same "plan," for, as the Constitution says, the General Conference can not "destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

We must determine what was the "plan" that had come down into 1808. Then we will know what the General Conference can not in any way, directly or indirectly, "do away" or "destroy" in whole or in part.

Whatever was that "plan"—whatever was involved in that "plan," the General Conference was prohibited by the Constitution from destroying, changing, or altering, neutralizing or disusing, and the Constitution on this point is precisely the same at this moment that it was in 1808. The "plan," then, must be the "plan of our itinerant general superintendency" now.

"The Plan" was not a formal document drawn up singly for the purpose of setting forth specifically the powers, privileges, and duties of the episcopacy, but was found in the written laws, in the usages, and in the common understanding of the functions and prerogatives of a bishop and of the bishops as a body.

Part of the plan was an inheritance from the Reverend John Wesley in what he intended, and in what he was accustomed to do, for in the early days the bishops followed the example and methods of Mr. Wesley.

Like Mr. Wesley, the bishops were the overseers of the work; like him, they had no fixed



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location, but had a general supervision; like him, they traveled hither and thither, over the whole work, and where new work might be taken up, according to their perceptions of the needs and possibilities.

Like Mr. Wesley, the bishop, or bishops, planned the work.

Like him, the bishop appointed the preachers to their several fields.

In general, there was this plan commonly recognized and exceedingly definite had there been no written law whatever, but much of the plan was definitely formulated and specifically enacted in the form of statutes or written law.

At the organizing Conference, when Wesley's followers in the United States modified their organization and became the independent Methodist Episcopal Church, certain specifications were adopted and placed in the new Book of Discipline, as has already been shown.

The "Plan" was found, first, in the statute law relating to the bishopric down to 1808; second, in the recognized custom or usages in relation to the functions, duties, powers, and privileges of the bishops; and third, in the logical or necessary implications or inferences from the formulated laws and the established usages or common understanding as to the work, the responsibility, the power, and privileges of a bishop or of the bishops.

Much of this is woven into the history of the Church and, particularly, in episcopal transactions and declarations.



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Whatever was "the plan" at the time of the General Conference of 1808, was to be "the plan" of the episcopacy after 1808, and, as far as the General Conference was concerned, it was to be "the plan" forever, for the Constitution put it beyond the power of the delegated General Conference to make any change itself.

What was fixed in the plan that existed at the time of the General Conference of 1808 was fixed in the organic law of the Church.

Whatever it was then it has legally been since. Find what it was then, and you know what it is now.

The episcopacy was a superintendency with certain authority vested in that superintendency. It was a "general superintendency" and not a limited local episcopacy. It was an "itinerant general superintendency," not fixed or limited, but movable from point to point throughout the whole Church, with the whole Church under its actual or possible supervision, and such a general itinerating episcopacy in harmony with "the plan" then in force, and well understood throughout the Church, and particularly by the bishops and the General Conference.

This kind of episcopacy was to be perpetuated. "Our itinerant general superintendency" was to continue to be ours. The general supervision could not be localized or restricted to a limited section of the Church, and "the plan" of this episcopacy as it was in 1808 was to continue to be "the plan" in the future, and the General

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Conference was specifically and emphatically forbidden to interfere with this plan of the episcopacy.

The General Conference can not, in any sense, destroy the characteristics of the episcopacy as they existed in 1808. It can not destroy, neutralize, diminish, or disuse any of the peculiarities of that episcopacy, for they were in "the plan." To modify or diminish is a partial destruction, and, therefore, is forbidden.

The General Conference can not in any way or degree destroy the peculiar quality of the episcopacy as a general superintendency, and it can not, in any sense, destroy the itinerant character of the general superintendency. As far as the General Conference is concerned, "our itinerant general superintendency" must remain—not a general superintendency, not some itinerant general superintendency, but "our itinerant general superintendency."

The General Conference can not change "the plan" of the episcopacy directly or indirectly, by an acknowledged attempt to do so or by a remote action apparently directed at some other feature of our economy but which is related to and would affect the episcopate.

Hence the remarkable phrasing of the third restrictive rule, "The General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy," etc.

The General Conference can not make a change directly, and it can not practically make

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a change by modifying any part of our economy or any remote rule of our government that would in fact or effect result in any change in the episcopacy.

It was made to stand as it was in 1808, and it is carefully guarded at every point.

The General Conference could not and can not destroy, neutralize, change, or disuse the episcopacy as it was down into 1808.

It could not, and can not now, abolish the kind of episcopacy or modify the plan as it was in 1808.

It could not, and can not, directly or indirectly, by changing or altering "any part or rule of our government," no matter how remotely it might touch the episcopacy, if that would change the episcopate as it was, and was understood, in 1808.

The Constitution of 1808 incorporated that episcopacy in the organic law, and it has been therein embedded and protected in the very same language through various constitutional changes, and is exactly the same in the present Constitution.

The "plan" that was in 1808 is "the plan" of the episcopacy to-day, and the Constitution puts it out of the power of the General Conference to touch and change that plan of episcopacy in any degree or any way, directly or indirectly, immediately or remotely.

The episcopacy was and is a "superintendency;" it was and is a "general superintendency;" it was and is an "itinerant general superintendency;" it was and is a peculiar episcopacy

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“our (own) itinerant general superintendency;” it was and is a peculiar episcopate according to “the plan of our itinerant general superintendency” as known in 1808; and the General Conference can not change that plan in any particular or in any way.

Under that plan the bishops were to superintend the work and the workers of the Church, not in a localized sense, but generally, as general superintendents, and they themselves were not to be localized in particular sections, but to itinerate over the Church generally, thus binding together and unifying the whole Church by preserving a unity of spirit and preventing local influences from developing such local differences, as the territory increased and the operations expanded, as would tend to produce different local types of ecclesiasticism which might bring about friction in and possibly the disintegration of the Church.

The work of the bishop was to be general rather than local; he was not to be limited to a fixed locality, but was to itinerate over and for the Church generally; he was to be a superintendent for the Church generally, a general and not a local superintendent; and to generally superintend he was to itinerate, or travel officially, through and for the general Church. This was the kind of episcopacy that was incorporated in the Constitution of the Church and placed beyond the power of the General Conference to destroy or modify directly or indirectly.

CHAPTER XI

AN EPISCOPACY FOR FOREIGN LANDS



## CHAPTER XI

### AN EPISCOPACY FOR FOREIGN LANDS

UNDER the Constitution of 1808, no bishop could be localized in any section of the United States of America, much less in any foreign land.

At the beginning the bishops were elected by the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America for the Church in the United States of America.

Wesley said in his circular letter to his followers in that part of North America which had become the independent Republic called the United States of America: "I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America." His letter further shows that by North America he meant the United States of America, for he refers to "the provinces of North America" that "are totally disjoined from their mother country, and erected into independent States," and says that the "American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy," which statement could refer only to "the Southern provinces of North America," which had become the United States of America. (Wesley's Circular Letter.) Hence, Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury were intended to be superintendents for the United States.

In the first Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal

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Church, printed in 1785, is the question, "Who are the superintendents of our Church?" with the answer, "Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

In 1787 the Minutes had:

"*Quest.* 1. Who are the superintendents of our Church for the United States?"

"*Ans.* Thomas Coke (when present in the States) and Francis Asbury."

This shows most plainly that the superintendents were for the United States of America and not for the territory beyond the United States.

It will be remembered that it was in that year the word bishop was first used in the Book of Discipline for the title superintendent.

In the Minutes for 1788 appears the following:

"*Quest.* 1. Who are the Bishops of our Church for the United States?"

"*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

They were *for* the United States.

In 1789 the Minutes have the following questions and answers:

"*Quest.* 1. Who are the Persons that exercise the Episcopal office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?"

"*Ans.* John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

"*Quest.* 2. Who have been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference to superintend the Methodist connexion in America?"

"*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

The first question and its answer were intended as a concession to and recognition of the



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Reverend John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who had exercised episcopal functions and was then performing episcopal duties.

The second question and answer show again that the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church were elected to superintend the Church "in America," which meant the United States of America. Coke and Asbury were bishops for the United States of America.

The same fact is distinctly presented in the Minutes for 1790:

"*Quest. 6.* Who have been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference to superintend the Methodist Episcopal Church in America?

"*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury.

"*Quest. 7.* Who are the persons that exercise the Episcopal Office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?

"*Ans.* John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

The change in the order of the questions is significant.

The question about exercising the Episcopal Office in Europe and America did not mean that the three persons named did so in both Europe and America, for as a matter of fact Bishop Coke and Bishop Asbury exercised no episcopal function in Europe, but, combining Europe and America as the fields for Methodism, in the combined field the three persons named did perform episcopal duty.

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By the time the Minutes for 1791 were printed Mr. Wesley had died, and, as there was no further reason for the grouping of the episcopacy for Europe as well as America, that question was dropped, but the other question continues:

“*Quest.* 6. Who have been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference, to superintend the Methodist Episcopal Church in America?

“*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury,” and the same appears in 1792, 1793, 1794, 1795, 1796, 1797, 1798, and 1799.

“In America” meant in the United States of America, and it was clearly understood that the bishops were elected to superintend the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, or, as stated in the Minutes of 1788, “*for the United States.*”

In 1800 Richard Whatcoat was elected a bishop, but, as he did not receive “the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference,” the question containing that form of words was dropped and the question became:

“*Quest.* 6. Who are the Bishops?” with the answer, “Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, Richard Whatcoat.”

The same form appeared in 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806. In 1807, Bishop Whatcoat having died, the question and answer became:

“*Quest.* 6. Who are the Superintendents and Bishops?

“*Ans.* Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury.”


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They were, however, the same persons who had been elected to be bishops "*for the United States,*" and nowhere else.

In 1808 William McKendree was elected a bishop, and the question and answer became:

"*Quest. 6.* Who are the Superintendents and Bishops?

"*Ans.* Francis Asbury, William McKendree," and to this was appended the following note:

" Dr. Coke, at the request of the British Conference, and by consent of our General Conference, resides in Europe: he is not to exercise the office of Superintendent among us, in the United States, until he be recalled by the General Conference, or by all the Annual Conferences respectively." That continued in the Minutes for 1809, 1810, 1811, 1812, and 1813.

Before the Minutes for 1814 were issued Bishop Coke had died at sea, when on a missionary tour to India, and there was no further occasion for the note.

These records show that from the beginning down to 1808, and later, it was plainly defined that the bishops were elected for service in the United States of America and that they were to reside in the United States.

So Doctor Coke was superintendent, or bishop, "of our Church, for the United States" "when present in the States," and when he resided outside "the United States" he was "not to exercise the office of Superintendent," or bishop, in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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Coke himself, in 1787, made a promise to the Conference that he would not act as a bishop of the Church when he was not in the United States of America. When out of the country he had undertaken episcopally to direct certain matters in the United States. To this the preachers objected, and at the Conference of 1787, (Lee's "History of the Methodists," p. 124), expressed their dissatisfaction and did it with great vigor.

In view of this, Bishop Coke acknowledged his mistake and gave the Conference a formal certificate, in which he said:

"I do solemnly engage, by this instrument, that I never will by virtue of my office as superintendent of the Methodist Church, during my absence from the United States of America, exercise any government whatever in the said Methodist Church during my absence from the United States. And I do also engage that I will exercise no privilege in the said Church when present in the United States except that of ordaining according to the regulations and law already existing, or hereafter to be made, in the said Church, and that of presiding when present in Conference, and, lastly, that of traveling at large.

"Given under my hand the second day of May, in the year 1787. "THOMAS COKE.

"Witnesses: JOHN TUNNELL,  
JOHN HAGERTY,  
NELSON REED."

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It was then that the Conference placed in the Minutes that Thomas Coke was a bishop, or superintendent, "when present in the States." In other words, he was not one of "the Superintendents of our Church for the United States" when he was resident outside of the United States.

These facts of history and these enactments show that the superintendents, or bishops, as the Discipline of this year, 1787, called them, were for the United States of America and not for foreign lands or countries beyond the United States. They were to reside in the United States for the work of the Church in the United States, and as Bishop Coke phrases it, one of their duties was "that of traveling at large" in the United States of America.

That was part of "the Plan" that came down through the early years of the Church and was incorporated in the Constitution of 1808, and which, unchanged, continues in the Constitution at the present time.

In those times no bishop resided outside the United States, and the Church did not think it possible for a bishop to reside in a foreign country and be an active or effective bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

Further, no bishop or general superintendent could be localized in any section of the United States, much less in any foreign land. That was the rule and practice prior to 1808, and "the Plan," including these ideas, laws, and practices,

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was incorporated in and perpetuated by the Constitution of that year.

Bishop Scott made a visit to the missions on the West Coast of Africa, sailing from Baltimore in the month of November, 1852, and sailing for the United States on the 17th of March, 1853. This was regarded as an emergency or missionary visit and as very exceptional. It was the first episcopal tour of the kind, and was regarded as of a missionary character, and the expense was met from the Missionary Fund. Then Liberia, from its origin and its early inhabitants, was regarded as a sort of extension of the United States, and the overflow of Methodism into Canada gave it also a peculiar relation.

Foreign missions about this time were demanding and receiving more attention and, incidentally, there was a growing conviction that more and closer episcopal supervision was required in the foreign field than had been given heretofore.

The particular field that first called for such special attention was, as has been seen, on the Western Coast of Africa. There the Republic of Liberia had been formed by colonies of free or freed Negroes from the United States of America, and in this Negro Republic were members and ministers connected with the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It was this mission that brought the question of local and residential episcopal supervision of a foreign field prominently and pressingly before

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the Church, and especially after Bishop Scott's visit in 1852 and 1853.

But no bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church could be placed in the foreign field as a permanent resident.

The field being outside of the United States, no bishop could be located therein, for all the bishops were elected for the Church in the United States of America, and all existing bishops were general superintendents, who, under "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," could not even be restricted to any particular locality in the United States, and of course could not be restricted to any foreign land.

It is plain that the superintendents, or bishops, were not intended, primarily, for foreign work, but for episcopal duty in the United States of America. They could not be localized inside the United States, much less could they be localized outside the United States.

It was plainly unconstitutional to restrict a general superintendent to a section of the home Church, and much more unconstitutional to restrict him to a foreign country.

Indeed, the Church did not dream that a general superintendent should be or could be assigned to a foreign country.

However, there was a growing feeling that a foreign mission should have its own direct episcopal supervision; first, because of the distance from the United States, and second, because of the difference in conditions and the peculiarity



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of the foreign demands. All the sections of the United States have marked similarities, but the foreign countries had such decided dissimilarities that it was thought the foreign fields needed bishops who could be permanently resident.

As the bishops of the general superintendent class—the only class in existence at that time—could not be so restricted in a foreign field to do the work required, it was evident that the only way the demand could be met was to create a new class of bishops who could be thus assigned and limited.

In other words, to meet the supposed or actual need, it was believed necessary for the Church to have a new class of bishops: first, bishops who could reside outside the United States of America; and second, bishops who could be limited to a specified section of the Church's territory.

But the Constitution of the Church did not permit this. The Constitution did not meditate such assignment and limited work for the kind of bishops, namely general superintendents, which it had had from its organization, and, under the Constitution, the General Conference was prohibited from making any modification in this kind of episcopacy and in its plan of action as it was operated in 1808.

To have bishops who could reside outside the United States and be limited to a section of the Church's field, it was necessary to change the Constitution of the Church, and this had to be done by the constitutional process of amendment, which



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could not be done by the General Conference alone.

So, in 1856, the General Conference of that year proposed an amendment to the third restrictive rule in the form of the following resolution:

“Resolved, That we recommend to the several Annual Conferences to alter the Discipline, paragraph 3, section 2, part I, by adding the words, after the word ‘superintendency,’ in the fourth line, ‘but may appoint a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his episcopal jurisdiction to the same respectively.’ ” (General Conference Journals, Vol. III, 1856, pp. 144-146.)

This amendment was concurred in by the Annual Conferences and became part of the Constitution.

With this amendment, the third restrictive rule of the Constitution read:

“They (the delegates in General Conference assembled) shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, nor destroy the plan of our general superintendency; but may appoint a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his episcopal jurisdiction to the same respectively.”

This amendment was proposed about seventy-two years after the organization of the Church, and forty-eight years after the adoption of the formal written Constitution.

The amendment modified the Constitution, but

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made no change whatever in the Constitution as it related to the bishops who were general superintendents, but practically emphasized "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

The amendment was an addition to what had been the third restrictive rule, but did not modify what had been the restriction in regard to the general superintendents, but introduced an exception permitting and relating to a new class of bishops, and at the same time showing that similar things could not be done with general superintendents.

The amendment made it possible to create a new class of bishops who would not be general superintendents and would not come under "the Plan of our itinerant General Superintendency."

Unlike the bishops who were general superintendents, these new bishops could and would be limited to a restricted field, not in the United States of America, but in foreign countries, and because their episcopal jurisdiction was limited to foreign mission fields they were called Missionary Bishops.

These missionary bishops, not being general superintendents, were not to be elected for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, but for a particular foreign mission and to be restricted to the particular field for which elected.

Not being general superintendents, but being elected for and assigned to a definite foreign field, the missionary bishop could have no episcopal su-

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pervision or authority in the United States of America, or in any mission field other than the one for which he was elected, though in his foreign mission field he would have the same power that belongs to a general superintendent in the United States, and if two or more missionary bishops should be elected for the same field, they would act as might a similar number of general superintendents in the home Church, the only difference being the episcopal limitation to a particular territory outside the United States of America.

Hence the General Conference of 1888 adopted the following: "A Missionary Bishop is a Bishop elected for a specified Foreign Mission field, with full Episcopal powers, but with Episcopal Jurisdiction limited to the Foreign Mission field for which he was elected;" and "When two or more Missionary Bishops are located in the same Foreign Mission field they shall be co-ordinate with one another." (Book of Discipline: Missionary Bishops.)

This could not be done with a bishop who is a general superintendent; first, because he was for the United States, and second, because he could not be localized.

The missionary bishop can be given a permanent residence abroad and his episcopal power can be limited to a mission field in a foreign land. Indeed, his election as a missionary bishop carries all that, as well as the particular field, with it.

All this, however, is a contrast to the bishop

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who is a general superintendent. None of these things can be done with him. He is not elected for a particular foreign field, but for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and he must conform to "the Plan of our itinerant general superintendency" as it was in 1808, and the General Conference likewise must conform.

There was no change in the Constitution as it related to bishops who were general superintendents, and there never has been. An addition was made which applies to the new kind of bishops, and between the old law and the addition there is a line of division marked by a *but*. The old law was to stand, but something else was made possible outside the United States.

The old line bishops are under the regulations down to 1808 and under "the plan" that prohibits their localization and makes them general bishops who superintend generally, who are not fixed in a locality, but who must itinerate generally; while the new kind of bishops do not come under "the Plan," but are to be localized bishops, residing in foreign lands and not in the United States of America.

The missionary bishop, therefore, is the only kind of a Methodist Episcopal bishop who can be restricted to a particular diocese or district, or be limited to a special field, and that is possible only outside the United States of America, and to make even that kind of arrangement legal

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required an amendment to the Constitution by the constitutional process.

The bishops of this new class were called missionary bishops because they had a foreign missionary jurisdiction, and in contradistinction to the regular bishops of the old form. Then the new class and new title made it necessary to distinguish in speech between the bishops and the missionary bishops who were limited as to territorial jurisdiction. So the bishops were more frequently called general superintendents, in contrast to the limited or missionary superintendents or missionary bishops.

No regular bishop or general superintendent ever has been limited to a foreign field, and, under the Constitution, no general superintendent or bishop can be so limited or restricted.

Neither could a bishop who is a general superintendent be placed in a foreign field and limited thereto, even temporarily, by a General Conference, for that would be a violation of the third restriction of the Constitution and contrary to "the Plan" of 1808.

Under "the Plan" the residences of the bishops or general superintendents were in the United States. In the olden time no one dreamed of the possibility of placing a bishop's residence outside the United States, and it was held that it was unconstitutional to ask a bishop or a general superintendent to make a permanent residence outside the United States of America.

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Bishops, who were general superintendents, were elected by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America for episcopal service in the United States of America and not for service in foreign parts.

As has been shown, Wesley indicated Doctor Coke and Francis Asbury as superintendents in the territory of the United States, and early General Conferences compelled Bishop Coke to desist from exercising his episcopal functions as a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church when he was outside the United States of America. The Church was "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America," and the bishops were for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America only.

So, for the location of bishops in foreign territory it was necessary to create a new class of bishops, and to do this it was necessary to amend the Constitution, as by the amendment of 1856, in order to make it possible to have bishops who could serve in and be limited to foreign fields, but who would have no episcopal supervision in the United States, for which country the general superintendents were elected. Thus there were bishops and missionary bishops—bishops who were general superintendents for the Church in the United States of America, and missionary bishops who were elected for specified mission fields in foreign lands. Thus did the Church maintain the distinctive character of the general

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superintendency, while it endeavored to meet the peculiar needs of its foreign missions.

The Church has always recognized a distinction between the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America and its missions in foreign countries, and there is still a different status between home and foreign territory.

Many facts show that the status of the work of the Church in foreign lands is not constitutionally or historically the same as that of the home Church in the home land, that is to say, in the United States of America.

Because of this legal distinction, the General Conference can do abroad what it can not do at home.

For example, it allowed Canada to become an independent ecclesiasticism, and it could, and did, set off Japan, because they were not in the United States, but were in foreign countries and under foreign political jurisdictions, but it could not in 1844 set off certain Southern Conferences, because they were in the United States and the Church was the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America and for the United States. Because of that, the General Conference could not set off a State or a Territory or a foot of land in the United States of America.

As it has done, the General Conference can set off its work in other foreign countries when it is deemed wise for the work in a particular foreign field to become autonomous or independent.



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In other ways the General Conference can do in and for foreign missions what it can not do in and for the home Church in the home land.

With the passing away of the older men and the incoming of new men into the General Conferences, many of whom knew less than the fathers of the Church about the genius of the ecclesiastical system, and who lacked a thorough knowledge of the Constitution and law of the Church, there has been not only a danger of losing sight of such fundamental principles, but some things have been done the constitutionality of which may be questioned, but the Constitution remains in force and is not abrogated by a violation, and especially by a mistake that grew out of a misapprehension of the law.

As the foreign work grew, bishops from time to time have been detailed for temporary visitations of foreign missions, but it was always well understood that these general superintendents belonged to and were for the home field in the United States, and these episcopal tours abroad were of the nature of extraordinary and temporary service, and that the bishops passing through the foreign countries were doing emergency work of a missionary character, while their residences and headquarters were in the United States, where they belonged.

Until a very late day no general superintendent, as such, went into a foreign field as the place of his residence, even for the time being.

No residence for a general superintendent ever



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was placed in a foreign country until the year 1900, and then it was not done without objection or protest.

In that year one residence was placed in Europe and another in China. Since then another residence was placed in South America, and later a second bishop has had a residence indicated in China. In Japan and Korea, in Africa, and in India there have been missionary bishops.

But even then the designation of a residence for a general superintendent in a foreign country did not legally locate the bishop in the foreign field or limit him to that foreign land. Residence does not localize a general superintendent anywhere, much less in a foreign country. No General Conference has ever attempted to do that, and no General Conference could constitutionally do that, and, as a matter of fact, every general superintendent who went to these foreign residences was not so limited, but had all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that belonged to the other general superintendents in the United States, and could go to the Bishops' Conferences, the General Committees, and the Board Meetings and all other gatherings where bishops were entitled to go under the law, and they had a right to go and did go, and they presided over Annual Conferences in the United States and performed other episcopal duties or functions in the United States of America as if they were resident therein.

In other words, every bishop who is a general superintendent has, under the Constitution,

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the same rights as any and every other general superintendent, no matter where may be his official residence, and he can not be restricted or limited anywhere as to these rights.

The missionary episcopacy is a very important and honorable department in the economy of the Church, and the missionary bishop is quite as potent in his field, which may be a continent or a vast empire, as any general superintendent is in his. Indeed, the missionary bishop seems to have greater independence.

The missionary bishop, from the very nature of his office, may meet the peculiar needs of his field as to language, traditions, religion, and political government as the general superintendency might not be able to do. Then, if the field should become independent the missionary bishop would naturally remain the head of the new Church, while a general superintendent would remain with the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

CHAPTER XII  
THE EPISCOPATE SINCE 1808



## CHAPTER XII

### THE EPISCOPATE SINCE 1808

FROM the adoption of the Constitution in 1808, while the episcopacy bore the same relation to the whole Church, it bore a very different relation to the new kind of General Conference, which the Constitution brought into existence.

Under the old kind of General Conference, which contained the body of the ministry and possessed the sovereign power of the Church, the episcopacy was subject to that body; but under the new kind of General Conference, which did not embody the full power of the Church, but only possessed delegated powers, the episcopacy was no longer under the control of the General Conference as it had been previously.

The Constitution gave the episcopacy a permanent position which the new kind of General Conference could not affect, for the new or delegated General Conference was not the whole Church, but a body with limited power.

This delegated General Conference was a creature of the Constitution and subject to the provisions contained in that formal document, but in the same document was incorporated the episcopacy as it had come down to the old style General Conference of eighteen hundred and eight.

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The Constitution of 1808 put the episcopate, as it then was, under the protection of the Constitution just as much as it did the General Conference. The same authority that guaranteed certain powers to the General Conference guaranteed certain powers to the bishops of the Church. What is more, the Constitution prohibited the General Conference from changing anything that inhered in or belonged to the episcopacy of that time. That is to say, the Constitution prevented the delegated General Conference from touching or modifying any of the then known powers, privileges, and duties of the episcopate; or, in other words, prohibited the General Conference from changing "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency" as it was in May, 1808, when the Constitution was made.

So the Church, through its Constitution, did several things:

First, it created and empowered the delegated General Conference.

Second, it gave recognition and guarantees to the episcopate for the purpose of perpetuating it as it was at that time.

Third, it prohibited the General Conference from interfering with the episcopacy as it then was.

Fourth, it placed the General Conference under the control and limitations of the Constitution and put it out of the power of the delegated General Conference to change the Constitution which created and gave it its rights. Changes could be

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made in the Constitution, but the General Conference of itself could not make them.

Thus the Constitution gave the episcopacy a permanent position by incorporating it in the Constitution, by giving it guarantees as to its nature and its rights, and by protecting the episcopacy from interference by the General Conference, just as it guaranteed existence and powers to the General Conference.

What was incorporated in the Constitution of 1808, relating to the episcopacy, has never been changed and to-day stands in the Constitution precisely as it did in that year, so that, constitutionally, the episcopacy at the present time is what it was in eighteen hundred and eight.

In regard to the general superintendency the Constitution of 1900 is the same as it was in 1808. What was in the Constitution of 1808 is precisely the same that is in the Constitution to-day. In other words, the episcopacy of to-day is, under the Constitution, the same as it was at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of 1808.

It is a superintendency carrying with it the same duties and the same powers. It is not a restricted, but a general, superintendency. It is not a fixed episcopate restricted to a limited locality, but an "itinerant general superintendency."

It is not merely an "itinerant general superintendency," but one according to "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency" as it was well known down to and in 1808.

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This involved many things, as for example, the overseeing of the affairs of the Church, the making of the districts, indicating pastoral charges, fixing the appointments of the traveling preachers, including the presiding elders, and traveling throughout the connection at large.

Bishop Hedding, in his "Administration of Discipline," quotes from Coke and Asbury's "Notes to the Discipline," published in 1798:

"*Our grand plan*, in all its parts, leads to an *itinerant* ministry. Our bishops are *travelling* bishops. All the different orders which compose our Conferences are employed in the *travelling line*; and our local preachers are, *in some degree*, travelling preachers. Everything is kept moving as far as possible; and we will be bold to say, that, next to the grace of God, there is nothing *like this* for keeping the whole body alive from the centre to the circumference, and for the continual extension of that circumference on every hand."

So in 1841, as in 1798, the bishops were "*travelling* bishops" as under the old "plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

In the General Conferences down to and including that of 1808, the bishops engaged freely in the business of the body, both making motions and discussing various questions. Subsequently to 1808 there are instances where they entered into the deliberations of the General Conference in a similar way.

In the General Conference of 1812, the first



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after the adoption of the Constitution, Bishop McKendree, who had been elected in 1808 prior to the adoption of the Constitution, instead of making a merely oral statement, presented a written address, which was read to the Conference. The Journal has this brief entry: "Bishop McKendree's address to the General Conference was read." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1812, p. 100.)

The Rev. Henry Smith, of the Baltimore Conference, in a letter dated February 6, 1833, gives the following narration of the incident:

"Previous to the first delegated General Conference, May 1, 1812, Bishop McKendree drew up a plan of business to be brought before the General Conference. His address was read in Conference; but as it was a new thing, the aged Bishop (Asbury) rose to his feet immediately after the paper was read, and addressed the junior Bishop to the following effect: 'I have something to say to you before the Conference.' The Junior also rose to his feet, and they stood face to face. Bishop Asbury went on to say: 'This is a new thing. I never did business in this way, and why is this new thing introduced?' The Junior Bishop promptly replied: 'You are our *father*, we are your sons; you never have had need of it. I am only a *brother*, and have need of it.' Bishop Asbury said no more, but sat down with a smile on his face. The scene is now before me. I believe the Bishops have pursued the plan ever since." (Paine's "Life of Bishop McKendree," Nashville, ed. 1885, pp. 226, 227.)

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The fact appears to be that Bishop McKendree had prepared the written address without advising with Bishop Asbury, his senior, and that accounts for the senior's surprise. In principle there was no difference between Bishop Asbury's oral statements to the Conference and Bishop McKendree's written address. It was simply a difference of form rather than fact, and the advantage for clearness and permanence was with Bishop McKendree's written address.

Bishop McKendree has left a memorandum in which he explains how he came to present a formal document instead of making a merely oral statement. This is the memorandum:

“General Conference, New York, 1812.

“The president (Bishop McKendree) invited a committee of the most respectable and influential members of that Conference as his council. In doing this, he designedly left out some who were supposed to be his confidential friends, and selected men of talents of different sentiments as to the polity of the Church. He stated to them his necessity of counsel on such occasions; complained of a distant and reserved carriage toward him, which he thought was improper, and might be injurious; assured them he had no selfish ends, and then presented them with an instrument of writing which he had prepared as an address to the General Conference. And as it was a new thing among us, he asked them to consider it attentively, and give him their opinion without

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reserve upon the propriety of presenting it; and if they thought an address advisable, to examine it critically and suggest such alterations and additions as they might think proper. They examined it, and reported in favor of the address. The president was pleased with their freedom and delicacy in suggesting an amendment—he saw the propriety of doing so, and it was altered on account of its having a particular bearing.

“W. McK.”

(Bishop Paine’s “Life of Bishop McKendree,” Nashville, ed. 1885, pp. 233, 234.)

Perhaps Bishop McKendree got his idea of a formal written address to the General Conference from the messages sent by the Presidents of the United States to the United States Congress from time to time. It was President Jefferson who introduced the usage of sending his written message by his private secretary.

The bishop’s right to communicate in writing his views and recommendations was not challenged by the General Conference, but the next afternoon, Wednesday, the 6th of May, the address was referred to the “Committee of the whole Conference,” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, p. 101), and, later, “so much of Bishop McKendree’s address as related to the Genesee Conference,” so much as related to a “division of the work in the Western country,” so much “as relates to the episcopacy,” so much as related “to local preachers,” so much as related “to doctrine, Discipline, and practice,”

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and so much as related "to unfinished business," were referred to special committees. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, p. 102.)

These itemized references give an idea of the topics treated in the Bishop's address.

Thus began the formal written episcopal addresses which since that time have been presented to each and every quadrennial General Conference since that time and which are regarded as a most important feature in the program and proceedings of the Conference, and which are read to the body shortly after its organization.

Bishop McKendree read his address on Tuesday afternoon, May 5th. On Friday morning, the 8th, just after the opening of the session, Bishop Asbury took another and rather singular method of getting his views before the Conference.

The Journal records that:

"Bishop Asbury addressed himself to Bishop McKendree, or to the Conference through him, in a kind of historical account of the work in past years, the present state, and what probably may be the future state of the work on the continent. Bishop McKendree rose and replied expressive of his approbation." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, p. 104.)

Portions of "Bishop Asbury's verbal address," as it was styled, were referred to various committees.

The next morning, May 9th, we find that at the beginning of the session "Bishop Asbury rose and addressed himself to Bishop McKendree, on

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the subject of defining the bounds of the Annual Conferences.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, p. 106.)

Again, on Friday morning, May 15th, at the opening, we have another specimen of the same method. “After calling the list, Bishop Asbury rose and requested leave of the Conference to address Bishop McKendree in the presence of the Conference. Leave was granted. Bishop Asbury then proceeded to address himself to Bishop McKendree and the Conference, conjointly. Bishop McKendree then rose and addressed himself to Bishop Asbury and the Conference.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, pp. 110, 111.)

This indirect method seems, however, to have been peculiar to Asbury, and appears to have had no imitators.

In the same General Conference there is an instance of a motion being made by Bishop Asbury. Thus the record says: “On motion of Bishop Asbury, it was voted that the district of Lower Canada be annexed to the Genesee Conference.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1812, p. 116.)

In subsequent General Conferences there have also been instances of bishops making motions and presenting resolutions and taking part in the deliberations.

As to the right of bishops to communicate with the General Conference there never has been a question. It has been claimed and conceded time and again.

More than that, there is a marked instance, in 1820, where a bishop not only addressed the Gen-

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eral Conference, but actually pronounced a certain action of the body to be unconstitutional. The question of voting, however, was another matter.

The Constitution, as it relates to the episcopacy, is to-day just what it was in 1808, and, consequently, the episcopacy is just what it was in 1808. As no power changed the Constitution as it relates to the episcopacy, the episcopacy remains unchanged.

From the beginning the Church has recognized the episcopacy as a department of its own kind. In 1808 the Church—the whole Church—in its sovereign capacity, recognized it as a special department in the ecclesiastical economy, and put it under the protection of the Constitution just as much as it did the delegated General Conference with its great but at the same time limited powers.

There was a power above both, and the power that gave existence and power to the delegated General Conference protected and perpetuated the episcopacy as it was down to and in the month of May, 1808, and specifically declared that the delegated General Conference should not, and that it had no power to, destroy or modify the plan of the episcopacy as it was at that time. Many other things the General Conference could do, but it could not touch that episcopacy. So the episcopacy constitutionally remains the same from 1808 down to the present time, and, as far as the General Conference alone is concerned, must continue the same.

CHAPTER XIII  
EPISCOPACY AND THE PRESIDING  
ELDERSHIP





## CHAPTER XIII

### EPISCOPACY AND THE PRESIDING ELDERSHIP

AMONG the interesting questions, discussed from time to time in the councils of the Church, few have thrown so much light upon the functions of the bishops, and upon the Constitution in its bearing upon the episcopacy, as those which have sprung from the presiding eldership.

The relation of the presiding eldership to the episcopacy has always been exceedingly intimate, because the presiding elder represented the bishop locally, and because he reported to the bishop, as well as because, as a source of information and suggestion, he was close to the bishop in the work of pastoral assignment. By many the presiding eldership was considered as a sort of sub-episcopacy, in view of the nature of the presiding elder's presidency and his work of supervision within his district. Like the Assistant under Wesley, who was Wesley's assistant, the presiding elder was assistant to the bishop.

From the beginning the bishop appointed the presiding elder, as he did the other preachers, and in the beginning all agreed that this was the proper thing and the only right thing to do. If he should appoint the preachers at all, it seemed

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that of all the preachers he should appoint the presiding elder, who was so closely associated with him in his work of episcopal superintendence.

Not many years passed, however, before there arose some who wished to diminish the power of the bishop, or at least to pass certain episcopal powers over to other parties, but the Church generally had little or no sympathy with these movements.

In 1808 the General Conference considered the matter of changing the composition and nature of the General Conference, and this consideration involved the question of adopting a written Constitution.

Some in that Conference desired to have an elective presiding eldership. They knew the power of the then existing General Conference, and they knew or supposed that the new General Conference would not have the same power after the adoption of the Constitution which would create, empower, and limit the new body. They also saw that every vital thing in existence in the Church at the time of the adoption of the Constitution would be protected by that instrument. It was important, therefore, for these innovators to get their proposition considered and adopted before the adoption of the Constitution. If they could secure the adoption of an elective presiding eldership by the existing general General Conference, then the delegated General Conference with its restricted powers would not, by itself, be able to change it. They knew these things, and

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they induced the General Conference to set aside the consideration of the Constitution until the Conference decided the question as to the election of presiding elders by the members of the Annual Conference.

Both sides understood the situation, and both naturally desired a settlement of the question.

The debate was doubtless an earnest one, for there were strong men on both sides. The supporters of the old method of episcopal appointment were anxious to continue the method which had come down from the beginning as most in harmony with the genius of the system, and they must have seen that if the time-honored mode of making presiding elders triumphed in the contest, then it would be covered and protected by the new Constitution. They could reason that the appointment of the preachers plainly belonged to the bishop, and, as a presiding elder was a preacher, the bishop had, and should have, the right to appoint him.

The outcome was the defeat of the proposition for an elective presiding eldership, so that the episcopal appointment of presiding elders, and whatever belonged to the episcopacy of that time, went under the protection of the Constitution and became a constitutional matter, and, consequently, the General Conference could not interfere with that any more than it could with any other particular embraced in "the plan" of the episcopacy. That being the case, the delegated General Conference could not take from the bishop the right

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to appoint a presiding elder any more than it could take from the bishop the right and duty to appoint preachers generally. The episcopal appointment of all the preachers belonged to "the plan" of the episcopacy, and that included the appointment of presiding elders, for they were preachers.

With an adverse vote on the question of an elective presiding eldership, the Constitution was adopted, and, with that decision in mind, the agitation was settled for the time being, and the renewal of the agitation in the future would have to deal with a different situation, for thereafter the Constitution would have to be taken into consideration, and not merely the question of the desirability or non-desirability of the proposition itself.

After a lapse of only four years, the effort was renewed in the General Conference of 1812. In that body, the first delegated General Conference, the question of giving the Annual Conference power to elect its presiding elders was again presented, but the General Conference defeated the proposition by a vote of thirty-nine in favor, to forty-three against.

In the General Conference of 1816 it was proposed to empower the Annual Conference to elect the presiding elders on the nomination of the bishop. This the Conference considered in the Committee of the Whole, and the Conference as a committee voted against the proposition by a vote

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of forty-two in favor to sixty against, being a majority of eighteen in the negative.

When the Committee of the Whole reported its action to the Conference, the question was debated, and the proposition to elect presiding elders on the nomination of the bishop was lost by a vote of thirty-eight in favor to sixty-three against, showing a steadily increasing opposition. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1816, p. 141.)

This was on Monday, the thirteenth of May. Nine days afterward, namely, on the twenty-first of May, "Samuel Merwin moved that the following resolution be adopted, viz.:

*"Resolved, By the delegates of the several Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, That the motion relative to the election and appointment of presiding elders is not contrary to the Constitution of our Church."*

This reveals the fact that the question of constitutionality had been involved in the discussion, and, though the proposition had been defeated, there were some who desired to have the Constitution eliminated from the matter, but the resolution was lost. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1816, p. 164.)

So the General Conference refused to declare that the election of presiding elders was not unconstitutional, and practically this refusal was equivalent to saying that it was not constitutional.

Two General Conferences had passed since the one in which the Constitution had been drawn up, discussed, and adopted. Another quadrennium

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passed, and some who were familiar with the historic Conference of 1808 had died, while probably the recollection of others had become less distinct. With these changed conditions there was an opportunity for a modified view on the part of the Church.

At least it happened that at the General Conference of 1820 a similar proposition in reference to the election of presiding elders on the nomination of the bishop came up, and a resolution to that effect was adopted by a vote of sixty-one to twenty-five. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1820, p. 221.)

This was on Friday afternoon, the nineteenth of May. In the previous week, on Saturday, May thirteenth, the Conference had elected Joshua Soule a bishop. On the afternoon of the nineteenth, just after the vote in favor of an elective presiding eldership,

“Brother Joshua Soule requested leave of absence for the afternoon,” and the leave was granted. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1820, p. 222.) Why did he leave immediately after the General Conference had voted that presiding elders should be elected? Possibly, perhaps probably, in order that he might have an opportunity for calm reflection in regard to this very matter. He had been elected to the episcopate, and, as a bishop, he would be expected to conform to and execute the laws enacted by the General Conference. What could his judgment and his conscience declare?

What he did do was to challenge the consti-

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tutionality of the action of the General Conference, and not only to pronounce the action to be unconstitutional, but also to declare that in view of its unconstitutionality he would not hold himself bound by the resolution relative to the nomination and election of presiding elders; as the General Conference record states it, he would "not hold himself bound to be governed by" it. (General Conf. Journal, 1820, p. 231.)

This was an assertion that a bishop-elect or a bishop had the right to consider whether an action of the General Conference was or was not constitutional, and to say whether he should or should not be compelled to carry out an order that he was convinced was unconstitutional.

Joshua Soule could speak on such questions with great authority for he had very much to do with the making of the Constitution of 1808; so much, indeed, that he has been called "the father of the Constitution," and no man had a better right to pronounce as its content and its meaning.

With these convictions, Joshua Soule wrote a letter to the Board of Bishops in which he expressed his views with great clearness and force. He considered that as the bishops were the proper parties to consecrate him to the episcopal office, it was proper for him to communicate his difficulties to them prior to the time for the service of such consecration.

In this letter to the Board of Bishops, dated May 18th, which was possibly a mistake for the 19th, the bishop-elect said:



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“In consequence of an act of the General Conference passed this day, in which I conceive the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church is violated, and that episcopal government which has heretofore distinguished her greatly enervated, by a transfer of executive power from the episcopacy to the several Annual Conferences, it becomes my duty to notify you, from the imposition of whose hands only I can be qualified for the office of superintendent, that under the existing state of things

*“I can not, consistently with my convictions of propriety and obligation, enter upon the work of an itinerant General Superintendent.*

“I was elected under the *Constitution and government of the Methodist Episcopal Church UNIMPAIRED*. On no other consideration but that of their *continuance* would I have consented to be considered a candidate for a relation in which were incorporated such arduous labors and awful responsibilities. . . . *I solemnly declare, and could appeal to the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of my intention, that I can not act as Superintendent under the rules this day made and established by the General Conference.*”

That he might not be supposed to be defiant of the General Conference, he added a postscript, in which he said: “I mean no more than that I can not, consistently with my views of propriety and responsibility, administer that part of the government particularly embraced in the act of the General Conference above mentioned.”



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(Bishop Paine's "Life of William McKendree," Nashville, 1869, edition 1885, pp. 316, 317.)

It must be evident that Mr. Soule was sincere, as well as emphatic, and that this "father of the Constitution" was thoroughly convinced that the appointment of presiding elders belonged absolutely to the bishops and that any form of an elective presiding eldership was an infringement upon "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," and a violation of the third restrictive rule of the Constitution of the Church.

Such a remarkable letter on such a vital subject could not but be of deepest interest to the bishops, for it involved profound legal principles. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that, following the receipt of Mr. Soule's letter to the bishops, the Board took the matter under consideration. As Bishop McKendree states in his Journal:

"The Bishops met early next morning, and the communication was attentively considered. It appeared that the difficulties of the Bishop-elect rested entirely upon the question of the constitutionality of the resolutions; and it was proposed for the Bishops to express their opinions on their constitutionality. Bishop Roberts was of the opinion that the resolutions of the Conference were an infringement of the Constitution. Bishop George chose to be silent. The senior Bishop (McKendree) considered them unconstitutional." (Paine's "Life of Bishop McKendree," 1885, p. 318.)

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Bishop McKendree, irrespective of his office, could speak with much authority as to the meaning of the Constitution, for he was a member of the General Conference of 1808 which adopted the Constitution, and, though he was not a member of the sub-committee that drafted the document, the members of that being Ezekiel Cooper, Joshua Soule, and Philip Bruce, yet he was a member of the main committee that reported the Constitution to the General Conference, and, furthermore, it was at that very Conference, and prior to the adoption of the Constitution, that William McKendree was elected a bishop under the original "plan" of the "itinerant general superintendency" and was elected by ninety-five out of one hundred and twenty-eight ballots cast, being more than a two-thirds vote. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1808, May 12th, p. 81.)

In view of all these facts, it was natural that Bishop McKendree would have convictions on matters relating to the Constitution and that he would be conspicuous in the expression of an opinion, so, at the meeting of the bishops, previously referred to, when the Board had pronounced the election of presiding elders to be unconstitutional, he proposed to carry the judgment of the bishops directly to the General Conference.

So, in his Journal, Bishop McKendree further remarks that:

"The senior Bishop then suggested the propriety of informing the Conference of the state of things. It was approved, and he was requested

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to make the communication, and the Bishop-elect, having been informed of the design, approved of the course." (Bishop McKendree's Journal in Paine's "Life of McKendree," ed. 1885, pp. 318, 319.)

So on Tuesday, May 23d, the Journal of the General Conference records that "Bishop Roberts took the chair near half-past ten o'clock," and "The debate on the subject under consideration was suspended, to allow Bishop McKendree to make a communication to the General Conference." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 229.)

The nature of that communication is set forth in Bishop McKendree's Journal. In it he says:

"When the president—Bishop Roberts—had called the attention of the Conference, the senior Bishop laid the case before them. The letter of the Bishop-elect to the Bishops was read; the conclusion of the council of the Bishops, and their resolution to ordain Brother Soule, were stated, as well as an intimation of their opinions respecting the constitutional difficulty. The sentiments of the Bishop-elect having been prepared, and, with a little modification, having been read, he retired, and the Conference resumed its business." (Paine's "Life of Bishop McKendree," ed. 1885, pp. 319, 320.)

The Journal of the General Conference has this entry: "The communication being ended, Bishop Roberts prayed, and Bishop McKendree pronounced his benediction on the Conference and withdrew." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 229.)

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Just what Bishop McKendree said in his address is not specified, for all the details are not given, but it is plain that he held that the episcopal appointment of presiding elders belonged to the "plan" of the "general superintendency" and so was protected by the third restrictive rule, just as much as the episcopal appointment of the other preachers. From the beginning, the appointment of preachers, including the presiding elders, was a function of the bishops, and was so specified in the law when the Constitution was adopted.

In 1792 the law read:

*"Quest. 7. By whom are the presiding elders to be chosen?"*

*"Answ. By the Bishops;"* and

*"Quest. 2. By whom are the Presiding Elders to be stationed and changed?"*

*"Ans. By the Bishops."*

So the law read when the Constitution was made, and so it read down to 1872, when the form was changed to:

*"The Presiding Elders are to be chosen by the Bishops, by whom they are also to be stationed and changed,"* which was simply a change from the style of question and answer and the combination of two questions and answers.

The presiding eldership was recognized as having a specially intimate relation to the episcopacy. The presiding elder was regarded as the local arm of the general superintendency, and

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as the agent of the bishop in matters of local administration.

In the same General Conference of 1820, before Bishop McKendree made his communication as to the unconstitutionality of an elective presiding eldership, and a week before the Conference took action upon the subject, the Committee on the Episcopacy reported as follows: "Your Committee think that the general superintendents are entitled to the thanks of this Conference for their patient and persevering efforts amid numberless toils and cares, in promoting the great and good cause in which they have been so extensively and faithfully engaged. There is one case, however, in which the episcopacy may be indirectly concerned, so far as they may be deemed responsible, under our present form of government, for the administration of their agents, the presiding elders, which your Committee conceive it their duty to express their decided disapprobation of, as a manifest violation of explicit and acknowledged law. It is the case of a preacher continued in the pastoral charge of the same station more than two years in succession, not indeed by the direction of the episcopacy, but against their express appointment." (General Conference Journal, 1820, p. 201.)

This was not really a criticism upon the bishops, but a censure of the presiding elders who had violated the law and defeated the intention of the bishops, and so the bishops might

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be regarded as only "indirectly concerned" because the presiding elders were their local representatives.

The main point, however, is that the report recognized the presiding elders as the bishops' representatives and speaks of them as "their agents, the presiding elders."

This report was adopted by the Conference and so became the expression of the General Conference. This fact Bishop McKendree would have regarded as an action conceding the point that the presiding eldership was so related to the episcopacy that the method of appointment to the office was protected by the Constitution. He would have reasoned that if the presiding elder was the agent of the bishop, then the bishop should have the right to select his agent. The Committee on Episcopacy logically admitted that the presiding elder did the bishop's local supervision, and hence was naturally and legally connected with the episcopacy.

Joshua Soule having expressed himself as opposed to an elective presiding eldership on constitutional grounds, and having declared that he would "not hold himself to be bound by" the action the General Conference had taken, some in the Conference were inclined to resent his refusal, and it was moved: "That the bishops be earnestly requested by this Conference to defer or postpone the ordination of the said Joshua Soule until he gives satisfactory explanations to this Conference." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 230.)

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Then the record tells us that, "After some debate, Brother Soule made some remarks," and it was "Moved and seconded that this resolution be indefinitely postponed," but, "before the question was taken on this motion the resolution was withdrawn." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 230.)

Then it was "moved and seconded to reconsider the question respecting the election of the presiding elders," (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 230), but the motion went over until the next day, which was Wednesday, the 24th of May.

That morning the question of reconsideration was debated *pro* and *con*, and at "Five minutes before eleven o'clock Brother Joshua Soule rose and expressed a wish that the General Conference should, by vote, request the episcopacy to delay his ordination for some time," but "No order was taken on the subject." On a call of the house at "seven minutes before twelve o'clock," it was found "there was not a quorum" present, and "Bishop George stated that the episcopacy had deferred the ordination of Brother Joshua Soule to some future period." (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 231.)

The next morning Joshua Soule presented "his resignation of the office of a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church," which in the afternoon he was requested to withdraw, but this motion was withdrawn. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, pp. 232, 233.)

On the morning of the following day, the twenty-sixth of May, the General Conference sus-



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pended the action for four years by adopting the following resolution: "That the rule passed at this Conference respecting the nomination and election of presiding elders be suspended until the next General Conference, and that the Superintendents be and are hereby directed to act under the old rule respecting the appointment of presiding elders." (General Conference Journal, 1820, p. 235.)

This shows what an impression Joshua Soule and Bishop McKendree had made on the Conference.

During the afternoon "The letter of Brother Soule to this General Conference, in which he tendered his resignation, being called for and read, it was moved and seconded that the Conference accept the resignation," but the motion was withdrawn, (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, p. 236), and it was "Moved that Brother Soule be and hereby is requested to withdraw his resignation, and comply with the wishes of his brethren in submitting to be ordained." This was carried; but, as Soule insisted upon his resignation, the Conference was compelled to accept it. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1820, pp. 236, 237.)

In this remarkable history several points stand out very prominently. In the first place, we find a bishop-elect pronouncing an enactment of the General Conference to be unconstitutional and declaring that he could not be governed by what he regarded as an unconstitutional act, though it had been voted by a General Conference.



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In the second place, we find the Board of Bishops considering the question of the constitutionality of an enactment of a General Conference and pronouncing an adverse judgment.

In the third place, we find a bishop appearing before a General Conference and declaring its act to be unconstitutional.

In the fourth place, we find a General Conference listening to episcopal declarations of the illegality of its action and then suspending the act which the bishops considered unconstitutional.

In the fifth place, we find a General Conference asking a bishop-elect, who had declared an act of the body to be unconstitutional and that he would not be governed by it, and who, therefore, even after the resolution had been suspended, resigned because he deemed the act a violation of the Constitution, to withdraw his resignation and permit himself to be consecrated to the office of a bishop.

And now, in the sixth place, we find a bishop appealing to the Annual Conferences to pass upon the constitutionality of an act of a General Conference.

This was done by Bishop McKendree, after the adjournment of the General Conference of 1820. In his Journal he says:

“The suspension of these resolutions opened the way for another effort to save the Constitution, to preserve the peace of the Church, and perpetuate the itinerant system—objects which, in his estimation, deserve every effort and sacrifice he can make. This was to lay the constitution-

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ality of these resolutions before the Annual Conferences as the only legitimate and supreme authority to decide in such cases. To this course he was providentially directed by a previous case in our administration. Under a provision in the Discipline, the Bishops formed the Genesee Conference in 1809. In the Virginia Conference there was an objection to this act, being, as it was supposed, unconstitutional. The Bishops submitted the question to the Annual Conferences. They acted upon it as a proper subject of their decision, and confirmed the act of the Bishops. By this act, the Bishops and the Annual Conferences tacitly declared the Annual Conferences to be the proper judges of constitutional questions; and the Senior Bishop is fully persuaded that, conformably to the genius of our government, all such cases as can not be otherwise adjusted ought to be submitted to their decision until otherwise provided for by the same authority on which the present General Conference depends for its existence." (Paine's "Life of Bishop McKendree," ed. 1885, pp. 321, 322.)

Thus justifying his action, he says in his Journal: "The senior Bishop, in hope of succeeding in this good work, prepared an address to the Annual Conferences, the object of which was to obtain a decision on the constitutionality of the suspended resolutions. If the decision should be in their favor, they would go into operation as soon as might be; but if against them, he advised the Annual Conferences to give their consent for

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the ensuing General Conference to introduce them conformably to the Constitution." (Paine's "Life of Bishop McKendree," ed. 1885, pp. 322, 323.)

The address which Bishop McKendree prepared and sent to the Annual Conferences, in its opening paragraph said: "I am induced by the present state of a long protracted controversy, respecting the *powers* of our General Superintendents, to lay the subject fully before you, hoping you will direct it to a proper conclusion." Then the senior Bishop continues:

"For a number of years a respectable minority in our General Conference have been endeavoring to divest the Bishops of the power of choosing the Presiding Elders, and of stationing the preachers. They wish to change the present form of government so as to invest the Annual Conferences with the power of choosing the Presiding Elders, instead of their being appointed by the Bishops, and then to transfer the power of stationing the preachers from the Bishops to the Presiding Elders. But this change, in the opinion of your Superintendent, would radically affect our system of government in several ways."

Then the bishop proceeds to specify what he regarded as the unconstitutional and injurious features of the proposition:

"1. It would effectively transfer the executive authority from the Bishops to the Annual Conferences, and thereby do away that form of Episcopacy and itinerant General Superintendency which is recognized in our Form of Discipline,

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and confirmed in the third Article of our Constitution.

“2. By doing away the present effective General Superintendency, our itinerant plan of preaching the Gospel would be greatly injured, if not entirely destroyed.

“3. In point of law, it would effectually invest the members of our Church of all constitutional security for their rights, and reduce them to the necessity of depending entirely on the wisdom and goodness of the General Conference for those inestimable blessings.”

By this the bishop meant that if the General Conference could disregard or override this particular of the Constitution, it could override some other, and every other, feature.

Proceeding, the bishop said:

“That the proposed change would effectually transfer the executive authority from the Bishops to the Annual Conferences, and thereby do away with that form of Episcopacy, with the itinerant General Superintendency, which is recognized in our Form of Discipline, and confirmed in the third Article of the Constitution, will appear from a due attention to our Form of Discipline. . . .

“From this view of our government, it evidently follows that the executive authority, or the power by which the Bishops are enabled ‘to oversee the business of the Church,’ consists in the power of appointing and controlling the preachers, and especially the Presiding Elders, because they are authorized to exercise all the powers of

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General Superintendents in the bounds of their respective Districts, except that of ordination; and might, but for their being subject to the control of the Bishops, so counteract and render the General Superintendency useless and nugatory, as effectually 'to do away that Episcopacy and itinerant General Superintendency' recognized in our Discipline and confirmed by the third Article of the Constitution. . . .

"It is very evident that the above resolutions contemplate taking the authority of appointing the Presiding Elders from the Episcopacy, at least so far as to leave nothing but a simple nomination. But if the General Conference possess the right to go thus far, they may, on the same principle, take away the power, or *privilege*, if you please, to nominate likewise, and thereby introduce Presiding Elders, independently of the Bishops' appointment, nomination, or control, and, in the issue, entirely destroy our itinerant Episcopal form of government, as has already been shown. Moreover, if the General Conference may deprive the Bishops of one part of their official powers, in defiance of the Constitution, why may they not of another? Why not of all? The authority that can take away one part of the executive power from the Bishops, may take away another, until they do away Episcopacy, and destroy the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency entirely; and the same power and authority that can effect this may effect whatever change they please, both in doctrine and Disci-

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pline. The subject involves the most serious consequences. It does not turn so much on the *utility* or *inutility* of the change proposed as on the *constitutionality* thereof, because on this point all our rights as preachers and members depend.

“With this view of the subject, your Superintendent could not submit his delegated powers to the General Conference without being chargeable with a breath of trust. . . . Your Superintendent, therefore, informed the General Conference that, in his judgment, the resolutions were unconstitutional, and consequently did not feel himself at liberty to carry them into effect.” (Bishop McKendree’s Letter in Paine’s “Life of McKendree,” ed. 1885, pp. 340-354.)

This episcopal letter was sent to each Annual Conference.

Seven Southern and Western Annual Conferences—Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia—declared the resolutions for an elective presiding eldership unconstitutional, but were willing to have the proposition submitted through the Constitutional process.

On the other hand, five Northern and Eastern Conferences, namely, New England, New York, Genesee, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, declined to take any action on the question.

In the seventh place, we find that the ensuing General Conference, that of 1824, made no objection to these proceedings of the bishop, or to the act of the Annual Conferences in sitting in judg-



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ment on the enactment of a General Conference, but, on the contrary, the General Conference of 1824 had respect to the act and authority or judgment of the Annual Conferences, and because they had pronounced the action of the General Conference of 1820 to be unconstitutional, the General Conference of 1824 declared the said act to be null and void.

In the General Conference of 1824, on Wednesday afternoon, May 19th, Peter Cartwright gave notice that he would offer the following:

“Whereas, The resolutions which were suspended at the last General Conference are null and void, inasmuch as a majority of the Annual Conferences have judged them unconstitutional, and whereas, six of the Annual Conferences have recommended their adoption; therefore,

“Resolved, by the delegates of the Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, That said resolutions go into effect as soon as their adoption shall be recommended by those Annual Conferences which have not recommended them, they being approved by two-thirds of the present General Conference.”

This, however, was not taken up the next day, but, on the afternoon of Friday, the 21st of May, it was withdrawn. (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1824, pp. 270, 277.)

The next morning, Saturday, May 22d, the General Conference of 1824 adopted the following resolution, offered by David Young, of the Ohio Conference: “Whereas, a majority of the An-

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nual Conferences have judged the resolutions making presiding elders elective and which were passed and then suspended at the last General Conference, unconstitutional; therefore,

“Resolved, etc., That the said resolutions are not of authority, and shall not be carried into effect.” (General Conf. Journal, 1824, pp. 278, 279.)

Referring to this matter, Doctor Tigert observes that “As the measure which the General Conference finally passed contained an equally clear and express statement of the principle, the General Conference of 1824 placed the formal stamp of its official approval upon the course • which Bishop McKendree had pursued, and recognized the binding, legal force of the decision which he had procured from the Annual Conferences.” (J. J. Tigert, D. D., “Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism,” Nashville, 1894, p. 382.)

On the last day of the General Conference of 1824 an effort was made “to take up the resolution relative to the suspended resolutions,” but the motion was lost.

Then Robert Payne and W. Capers “Moved that it is the sense of this General Conference that the suspended resolutions, making the presiding elder elective, etc., are considered as unfinished business, and are neither to be inserted in the revised form of the Discipline nor to be carried into operation before the next General Confer-



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ence," and this was adopted. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1824, p. 297.)

But the most remarkable act of the General Conference of 1824, bearing upon this question, was that it again elected to the episcopacy the Reverend Joshua Soule, who four years before had declared an elective presiding eldership unconstitutional. So they accepted both him and his opinion.

Four years later, in the General Conference of 1828, the resolutions were rescinded. The question as to the suspended resolutions on the election of presiding elders was reported and taken up, and

"Wm. Winans moved, Wm. Capers seconded, that the subject of the report be disposed of by adopting the following resolution, as a substitute for the resolution which was laid over as unfinished business, viz.:

"Resolved, etc., That the resolutions commonly called the suspended resolutions, rendering the presiding elders elective, etc., and which were referred to this Conference as unfinished business, and reported to us at this Conference, be, and the same are hereby rescinded and made void." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1828, p. 332.)

This was carried, and thus the General Conference sustained the constitutional view of Soule, McKendree, Roberts, and the Annual Conferences that an elective presiding eldership was unconstitutional.

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In the General Conference of 1828, the day after the suspended resolutions on an elective presiding eldership has been rescinded (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1828, p. 232), another effort was made to revive the agitation in favor of such a method of designating the presiding elders.

It was proposed to amend the existing law so as to make it read:

*“Quest.* How shall the presiding elders be chosen and stationed?

*“Ans.* Each Annual Conference shall elect its own presiding elders for its respective districts, and the presiding elders when so chosen shall be an efficient council to assist the bishops in the appointments of the preachers to their several circuits and stations,” but “This resolution was, on motion, laid on the table.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1828, p. 335.)

Thus ended an agitation which had continued a score of years and which was defeated by the conviction that the proposition was unconstitutional.

This was a great constitutional episode, and, no matter what may be thought of the proposition itself, the decision of the bishops, the Annual Conferences, and the General Conference gave an interpretation to the Third Restriction of the Constitution, and to the limitation on the power of the General Conference in regard to the episcopacy.

In effect, and in fact, the bishops, the Annual Conferences, and, finally, the General Conference

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agreed that the appointive presiding eldership was included in "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," as stated in the Third Restrictive Rule of the Constitution, and that, under this limitation, the General Conference was restricted from changing the relationship between the bishops and the presiding elders. To do this would require recourse to the constitutional process which involved the legal consent of the ministry in the Annual Conferences. The same constitutional view prevailed in the General Conference of 1876 when the question was considered again. Thus it was understood and decided that what was involved in the plan or in the methods of the episcopacy in 1808 could not be changed or neutralized by the delegated General Conference, and the same restriction remains in the Constitution at the present time.



CHAPTER XIV  
THE AUTHORITY OF BISHOPS



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE AUTHORITY OF BISHOPS

THE power of the bishops in the Methodist Episcopal Church is worthy of careful study.

An unenlightened person who knows but little about episcopal functions in this Church might be tempted to say that the bishop has unusual, tremendous, and unparalleled authority.

Such an uninformed or half-informed person assumes that all power reposed in and exercised by individuals is something abnormal and unnatural, and something not only to be deprecated, but also, if possible, to be destroyed, and, in a bishop especially, should at least be greatly diminished.

But nothing is plainer than that power is common, necessary, and must be reposed somewhere. The manufacturer must have his superintendent, the man in extensive business must have his heads of departments, and the workingman needs his overseer to direct and stimulate him to the steady performance of his task, and every one who superintends must be clothed with some authority, for without it the system in any sphere would not be effective.

So in all forms of government it is necessary

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to repose executive or administrative authority in an individual rather than in the mass or in a committee, and even where the committee form is used, it is usual for it to select some particular person and deputize him to do work that the committee altogether is not well fitted to do. The mass-meeting is found too unwieldy to work out many details, or to govern that which is extensive, while the judgment of a committee is too uncertain, and is usually found to be less reliable, for executive purposes, than that of a competent individual, who is required or may be required to give an account of his stewardship. So in city governments great responsibility is placed upon the chief executive.

There is nothing unparalleled about episcopal authority. A bishop has nothing like the power vested in the President of the United States, as the Chief Executive of the Nation and as Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy, and yet it is a free people who give him such vast powers.

In a democratic government great authority is vested in a judge so that he individually decides far-reaching questions of law, and pronounces severe sentences upon the condemned, yet the people for generations, and indeed for many centuries, have considered it necessary for a judge to possess such authority and, indeed, have thought such individual power was necessary for the safety of the people and for the preservation of their liberties.

That being the case, there is nothing surpris-



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ing or alarming should it be found that a Church officer, whose duty it is to superintend the Church, is clothed with a degree of authority far less than that possessed by a President, a judge, or a general.

Because great power is vested in an individual for the good of all, it does not follow that the officer will abuse that power or exercise that authority to the extreme or without due consideration. On the contrary, the responsibility is likely to make the official conservative and, especially where there are many checks, to restrain him and to hold him within the bounds of propriety.

That bishops have some power is to be presumed and conceded, even if we knew none of the particulars, because it has been found necessary for all officials and especially executives to have some degree of authority, and that the degree of power shall be proportioned to the quality and extent of the responsibility resting upon the official. So a President, a general, or a judge is necessarily clothed with discretionary authority commensurate with his high office.

That being the case, it follows as a matter of course that a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church has, and must have, authority and that he should have power sufficient to freely perform his executive and other duties.

One who has not carefully studied the subject might talk slightly about what he terms "episcopal prerogatives," but there is no argument in a sneer or a flippant remark, and particularly of

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one who does not understand the system under which the bishop acts.

Of course there are "episcopal prerogatives," as there are presidential and judicial prerogatives. Indeed, every one with any responsibility and any degree of authority has something of the nature of a prerogative. There must be prerogatives pertaining to every office. A policeman has his prerogatives, and the janitor of a building or the sexton of a churchyard has his duties, and so his prerogatives.

Then, there is nothing dreadful in the word itself to one who has an intelligent knowledge of its meaning: *prae*, before, and *rogare*, to ask, literally, that is, asked before. As the dictionary says, a prerogative is "an official right; a privilege inherent in one's office or position." (Century Dictionary.)

The uninformed and thoughtless are apt to exaggerate the power supposed to be possessed by officers of high rank, and to imagine that the official has a degree of power far beyond that which the facts will justify.

So, through this misunderstanding of the facts, there may be a demand that the officer do what he has no authority or right to do, or, on the other hand, there may be a demand that he be deprived of the little authority which he does possess, and which is absolutely necessary for the efficient discharge of the most ordinary duties of the office which he holds.

In a similar way, through a failure to know

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the history, and a lack of knowledge as to the law, well-meaning persons might misunderstand the real situation and demand unnecessary, unwise, and injurious modifications of episcopal authority, which, if agreed upon, would weaken the entire ecclesiastical system and bring disaster in many directions.

In view of this tendency, it is proper to ask whether the supposed power of a bishop is real or imaginary, and whether the real power is as great as some imagine, and, further, whether it is disproportionately great in view of the important duties to be performed by a bishop in the interest of the Church and for the good of both ministers and members.

Some reference has already been made to the functions and powers of a bishop, and of the Board of Bishops, so that in most instances a mere allusion, instead of a detailed statement, may be sufficient.

Is the power of a bishop as great as some might suppose, or is it greater than the responsibilities of the position demand? It may also be asked whether the tendency is to unduly increase the authority of the bishops.

A student of the history and laws of the Methodist Episcopal Church will be impressed with the fact that there has been little or no increase in the power of its bishops during more than a century, but that, on the contrary, the power of the bishops in the earlier years of the Church was much greater than it is in the present time.

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That is an important point to keep in mind. There has been no increase in episcopal power, and no marked tendency to increase it, in the course of generations.

That there has been no increase of power in the episcopacy may be seen by a comparison between what it was in the early period of the Church's history and what it is now.

Consider the powers of the early bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In that early period the bishops had all the essential powers possessed by the bishops of to-day. Like those of the present day, they had power to preside over the Conferences, to ordain, to fix the appointments of the preachers, and to do other things that belong to the episcopate of the present time, but they also possessed other and, in some instances, much greater powers.

For example, in the early days no one could be ordained without the consent of the bishop. As the law at the beginning read, no one could be ordained "without the consent of a majority of the Conference, and the consent and imposition of hands of a superintendent."

Now the Conference determines and the bishop has no power to say who shall or shall not be ordained. At the present time the bishop is simply the servant of the Conference in this matter.

In Whatcoat's account of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church appears the following:

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“Persons to be ordained are to be named by the Superintendent, elected by the Conference, and ordained by the imposition of the hands of the Superintendent and elders; *the Superintendent has a negative voice.*” (Phœbus’s “Memoirs of Whatcoat,” p. 21. The italics are Whatcoat’s.)

Now the Conference alone determines and the bishop is not supposed to have any option in the matter, but is expected to act simply as the servant of the Conference in ordaining the person elected by that body.

Nevertheless, if in an extreme case, when between the election and the ordination something serious was alleged against the candidate, the bishop would have a right to postpone the service in order that there might be time for investigation. That is the meaning of the opening words in the ordination service: “If there be any of you who knoweth any crime or impediment . . . let him come forth in the name of God, and show what the crime or impediment is.” So, if the objection were presented privately or publicly, there could be a stay in the proceedings.

It was also understood that the episcopal authority could refuse to consecrate an elected bishop and annul the election.

So the law of 1784 read: “No person shall be ordained a superintendent, elder, or deacon, without the consent of a majority of the Conference, and the *consent* and imposition of hands of a superintendent; except in the instance provided for in the twenty-eighth minute,” (First

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Discipline), which minute referred to the consecration of an elected person to the bishopric should there happen to be no bishop in the Church.

Bishop Hedding, in commenting on this law, says, "From the above it appears the superintendent (or bishop) had power to negative any election of superintendent, elder, or deacon." (Hedding, "Administration of Discipline," New York, 1841, ed. 1850, p. 9.)

In these latter years no bishop has assumed authority to veto the election of any one to the episcopacy or refused to consecrate the bishop-elect.

In 1820, when a bishop-elect informed the bishops that he must decline to be consecrated to the office because of what he regarded as an unconstitutional enactment of the General Conference of that year, Bishop McKendree wrote a statement in which he said:

"Had the Bishops judged his conduct unworthy of the trust confided to him by his election, they would have returned him to the Conference with their objections to his ordination." (Paine's "Life of McKendree," I, p. 425.)

This illustrates a survival of the old idea that the bishops could refuse consecration to one elected to the office of a bishop, but in this case, not because they did not approve of his election, but because they might have "judged his conduct unworthy of the trust confided to him by his election," and then they would not determine

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the matter, but refer the matter with the reasons or information to the General Conference, which could institute an inquiry.

In the early days the bishop had authority to "receive or suspend preachers," in the interim between Conferences, (First Discipline), but at the present time no bishop exerts such power, or is supposed to possess such power.

In those days no preacher could print anything without the consent of a bishop. As the law read, "Print nothing without the approbation of one or other of the Superintendents." (First Discipline.)

At that time it was "the office of a Superintendent," or bishop, "To receive appeals from the Preachers and people and decide them." (The Discipline.)

The bishop was a Supreme Court to hear and determine appeals, but, in 1787, this power was taken from the bishop, and the bishop does not possess it to-day.

Referring to these points, Bishop Hedding, in 1841, said:

"From the above it appears the superintendent had power to negative any election of superintendent, elder, or deacon, and to prevent any preacher from printing anything which he did not approve.

"That he also could decide the cases of *all*, preachers and people, who should appeal to him; and that he was the judge whether they should



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be expelled from or retained in the Church.” (Hedding on “The Administration of Discipline,” delivered 1841, ed. 1850, p. 9.)

But the bishops have no such power to-day.

The first book of Discipline thus summarizes the duties and authority of a bishop at the beginning of the Church:

“*Ques.* 26. What is the office of a superintendent?

“*Ans.* To ordain superintendents, elders, and deacons; to preside as a moderator in our Conferences; to fix the appointments of the preachers for the several circuits, and in the intervals of the Conference to change, receive, or suspend preachers, as necessity may require; and to receive appeals from the preachers and people and decide them.”

The bishop was the president of the Conference; in him was vested the power to ordain; he had the authority to fix the appointments of the preachers; he could receive or suspend preachers when the Conference was not in session; and he could try and determine appeals.

To summarize: In the early days the bishop acted as a superior court and decided appeal cases;

The bishop could receive a preacher into the ministry, and, on the other hand, could suspend a preacher from the ministry;

The bishop could prevent a preacher putting anything into print and circulating the same;

The bishop could veto the election of any



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preacher to clerical orders and refuse to ordain any one so elected by a Conference;

And the bishop could also veto the election of a minister to the bishopric, and refuse to consecrate him to that office.

But all these powers have disappeared from the episcopacy.

Down to the adoption of the Constitution of 1808, and the change in the composition and nature of subsequent General Conferences through the adoption of that Constitution, the General Conference had power to make these changes, but since the General Conference of 1808, the General Conferences, being of a different kind, have had no power to change anything about or in the episcopacy.

In those early times the bishop had a voice and a vote in the consideration of proposed laws and in the making of new laws.

Down to the adoption of the Constitution of 1808, the bishops engaged in the debates and participated in the proceedings of the General Conferences with about as much freedom as, and because of their office, with more influence, than the members on the floor, and, down to and including the General Conference of 1808, they could make motions and present resolutions in the General Conferences, and since that time there have been instances when bishops have made motions and introduced resolutions.

Now, however, bishops are not supposed to claim any right to do so.

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Considering all these facts, it is plain that instead of gaining, the bishops have lost power, as compared with the authority of the bishops of the earlier times.

As Bishop Hedding has said: "The power with which the bishops are invested was formerly much greater than it is now." (Hedding, on "The Discipline," New York, p. 8.)

"The superintendents now have no power in the Church above that of elders; except what is connected with presiding in the Conferences, fixing the appointments of the preachers, and ordaining. They have no voice in any question to be decided by vote in any Conference; no vote even in making the rules by which they themselves are to be governed. They are the servants of the elders, to go out and execute their commands.

"At the same time they are held rigidly responsible, not only for their private conduct, but also for their official acts." (Hedding, on "The Discipline," New York, p. 10.)

Many of the rights, privileges, and powers that belong to the old time episcopacy are not possessed by the episcopate of to-day. But the present General Conference, as it has been since 1808, can make no further diminution of the powers of the episcopate. That is to say, the General Conference, of and by itself, can not make any change, for the previous General Conference, which had all power, bound the delegated General

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Conference, under the provisions of the Constitution, not to interfere with the episcopacy.

Hence, whatever belonged to the episcopacy in 1808 belongs to it at the present time.

There has been, therefore, no great growth in the authority of a bishop, but, on the contrary, a great diminution of authority as compared with the original power of the episcopate.

We should ask, What power has a bishop now?

The bishop has no power to make or mend the laws of the Church, but he must obey them. Neither can the bishops make or amend the Constitution of the Church, but they are subject to it.

In the interim of General Conferences, the bishops are the law-officers of the Church to interpret the laws and to rule upon points of law, but the next General Conference may reverse his rulings.

The bishops are also the chief executive officers to execute the laws and to carry into effect the orders of the General Conference, and also "to oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the Church," (Book of Discipline), but the General Conference may review and revise their action in specific instances.

In one sense, bishops have very little power. They are set aside and isolated from the powers that belong to the ministers generally, and even to the laymen. They are not allowed to make the laws, and they can not vote to elect a single dele-

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gate to help make the law, but they must be governed by the laws which others make.

Then, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church have nothing like the power possessed by bishops in other Churches.

By this we do not mean the Roman Churches and similar ecclesiastical bodies, but Protestant bodies that have an episcopal government. For example, the Protestant Episcopal Church.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church the bishops have very great power in legislation. In that Church the bishops constitute an Upper House in the General Convention, so that the Convention has two houses, the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, making the Lower House; and the House of Bishops, constituting the Upper House. While the sessions of the House of Deputies are public, the sessions of the House of Bishops are private. The bishops have power to concur or non-concur in laws passed by the Lower House, and they can initiate laws and pass them down to the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, and no act can become a law without the consent of the House of Bishops. In other matters also they have powers far beyond those possessed by Methodist Episcopal bishops.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the bishops are a sort of supreme court, having a veto power over the enactments of their General Conference, so that, if they think a law or regulation passed by the General Conference is unconstitutional, they can so declare and check its execution

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until the question of constitutionality has been passed upon by the Annual Conferences; but, in the law of the Methodist Episcopal Church there is no specific enactment of a similar nature.

Still there have been some who have held that there is nothing to prevent a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church declaring in a General Conference that, in his judgment, an act or a proposed enactment is not in harmony with the Constitution, very much as he might rule against a proposition in an Annual Conference on the same ground. There has also been some expression in favor of a specific law on the subject.

Indeed, in the General Conference of 1820, after bishops had declared a certain enactment unconstitutional, and the General Conference had suspended the rule, the following proposition was presented to formally give the bishops power to veto an action they believed to be a violation of the Constitution of the Church:

“Whereas, a difference has arisen in the General Conference about the constitutionality of a certain resolution passed concerning the appointment of presiding elders; and whereas, there does not appear to be any proper tribunal to judge of and determine such a question; and whereas, it appears important to us that some course should be taken to determine this business; therefore,

“*Resolved*, etc., That we will advise, and hereby do advise the several Annual Conferences to pass such resolutions as will enable the next General Conference so to alter the Constitution

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that whenever a resolution or motion which goes to alter any part of our Discipline is passed by the General Conference, it shall be examined by the superintendent or superintendents; and if they, or a majority of them, shall judge it unconstitutional, they shall, within three days after its passage, return it to the Conference with their objections to it in writing. And whenever a resolution is so returned, the Conference shall reconsider it, and if it pass by a majority of two-thirds it shall be constitutional and pass into a law, notwithstanding the objections of the superintendents; and if it be not returned within three days, it shall be considered as not objected to and become a law." (General Conference Journal, 1820, p. 238.)

That suggests and sounds like Section 7 of Article I of the Constitution of the United States of America, which says:

"Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his Objections, to that House in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the Objections at large on their Journal, and proceed to reconsider it. If after such Reconsideration two-thirds of that House shall agree to pass the Bill, it shall be sent, together with the Objections, to the other House, by which it shall likewise be reconsidered, and if approved by two-thirds of that House, it shall

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become a Law. . . . If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the same shall be a Law, in like manner as if he had signed it, unless the Congress by their adjournment, prevent its return, in which case it shall not be a Law.”

The proposal in the General Conference of 1820 to give a formal veto-power to the bishops, bears such a striking resemblance to the article in the Constitution of the United States which gives the veto-power to the President, that we must conclude that the form was based upon that article, as though it were thought that if the President could be entrusted with the power of veto, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church should be formally entrusted with similar power.

The proposition recognizing the right of the veto in the bishops was adopted by the General Conference and sent down to the Annual Conferences, but there appears to be no record as to what the Annual Conferences did or did not do in regard to this important matter that was submitted to them. Perhaps they thought it unnecessary to do so, since bishops had actually pronounced on the unconstitutionality of an act of that General Conference, and the General Conference had then suspended the act.

However that may be, at the next General Conference meeting in 1824, the idea of a formal veto-power expressed in the law was renewed, though with a modification that under certain cir-



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cumstances the Annual Conferences should be consulted.

Lovick Pierce offered the following resolution, which was seconded by William Winans:

*“Resolved*, by the delegates of the Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, That it be and is hereby recommended to the several Annual Conferences to adopt the following article as a provision to be annexed to the sixth Article of the ‘limitations and restrictions’ adopted by the General Conference in 1808, viz.:

*“Provided*, also, that whenever the delegated General Conference shall pass any rule or rules which, in the judgment of the bishops, or a majority of them, are contrary to or an infringement upon the above ‘limitations and restrictions,’ or any of them, such rule or rules being returned within three days after their passage, together with the objections of the bishops to them, in writing, the Conference shall reconsider such rule or rules, and if, upon reconsideration, they shall pass by a majority of two-thirds of the members present, they shall be considered as rules, and go into immediate effect; but in case a less majority shall differ from the opinion of the bishops, and they continue to sustain their objections, the rule or rules objected to shall be laid before the Annual Conferences, in which case the decision of a majority of all the members of the Annual Conference present when the vote shall be taken shall be final. In taking the vote in all such cases in the Annual Conferences, the secretaries shall give a



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certificate of the number of votes, both in the affirmative and negative, and such certificates shall be forwarded to the editor and book-steward, who, with one or more of the bishops who may be present, shall be a committee to canvass the votes and certify the result." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1824, p. 267.)

On the 21st of May, "The question was taken on the resolution, when it was sustained, sixty-four voting in the affirmative and fifty-eight in the negative." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1824, p. 277.)

Thus a second General Conference adopted a plan for regulating the use of the veto power by the bishops. What the Annual Conferences did with this proposal of 1824 the Journal of the General Conference of 1828 does not say, but as the provision for the amendment of the Constitution at that time required the consent of "all the Annual Conferences," the probability is that every Conference did not concur and, therefore, the amendment failed.

Commenting on the proposition to take the judgment of the Annual Conferences on an action that had been vetoed, Dr. John J. Tigert, in his "Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism," says:

"But the Annual Conferences, though like the Bishops a party in interest, affected by the legislation of the General Conference, are also made up of the body of traveling preachers, who originated both the Delegated General Conference and its Constitution. They, therefore, are rightly the

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ultimate judges of any infringement of the grant of power which they have made to their agent, the Delegated General Conference. But the Bishops are the easy and natural executive agents for the temporary arrest of legislation until an appeal can be taken to the Annual Conferences, to which a veto power, in the proper sense, alone belongs.” (J. J. Tigert, “Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism,” Nashville, 1894, p. 356.)

The same author also says:

“When the General Conference of 1808 adjourned, it left in existence the body of traveling preachers, distributed in the several Annual Conferences; the Bishops, constitutionally protected in the enjoyment of all the powers they had hitherto exercised ‘according to the plan of our itinerant general superintendency;’ and the plan for a Delegated General Conference, ordained by the body of traveling preachers in General Conference assembled, as a charter or constitution for their agent, the Delegated General Conference. These three things the first delegated General Conference of 1812 found in existence when it assembled. The Bishops, being a distinct branch of the government, coeval with the existence of the Church, antedating the Delegated General Conference and its Constitution by a quarter of a century, and in that Constitution protected by a restrictive rule emanating from the body of elders and giving permanency and independence to their office as it existed from the beginning, are the

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natural and only efficient guardians of the Annual Conferences against General Conference encroachment." (Dr. J. J. Tigert, "Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism," Nashville, 1894, p. 362.)

Doctor Tigert, in this connection, gives the following interesting history: "The action of 1824, though introduced by Messrs. Pierce and Winans, did not originate with them. Bishop Paine, who was the youngest member of the General Conference of 1824, has preserved a document which is in nearly *verbatim* agreement with the actual measure passed, and which is signed by W. McKendree, Enoch George, R. R. Roberts, Thomas L. Douglass, and Wm. Capers. Bishop Paine wrote from his notes, made at the time, without access to the Journals of the General Conference. His memoranda and the official Journal agree in essentials. He says:

" 'Friday, May 20th [21st], another question of importance came up, called the "constitutional test," the object of which was to prevent hasty action, violative of the Constitution, by giving the Bishops a qualified veto, with an ultimate reference of the question to the Annual Conferences. It involved constitutional questions only. The Bishops, anticipating some action of the kind, had agreed to write and, if desired, present to the Conference the following amendment to the sixth Article of the "limitations and restrictions," adopted by the General Conference in 1808, signed by their own hands and two others.'

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“Then follows, with a few unimportant verbal variations, a copy of the measure which the General Conference actually passed, signed by the three bishops. The names of Douglass and Capers were added; and Pierce and Winans, for some reason now undiscoverable, were selected to introduce it instead of Douglass and Capers.” (Dr. J. J. Tigert, “Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism,” Nashville, 1894, pp. 356, 357.)

It will be at least of some interest to quote a few other comments of Dr. Tigert on this subject. Referring to the General Conference of 1820, he says:

“On the last day of the session, however, a measure of vital importance was passed. In 1820 the Constitution of 1808 was subject to its first severe strain, and a grave defect in its provisions was revealed. No tribunal had been provided to pass upon the constitutionality of the acts of the General Conference. There were many parties in interest, the Church, the General Conference, the Bishops, and the Connexion of itinerant preachers, distributed in the several Annual Conferences. ‘This want of a constitutional test,’ remarks a high authority, ‘must be supplied sooner or later by the civil, if not by the Church, courts.’ Face to face with the practical difficulty in an alarming form, the General Conference of 1820 adopted the following measure of relief.” (J. J. Tigert, “Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism,” Nashville, 1894, p. 353.)

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Here follows the veto act of 1820. Later Dr. Tigert says that "Twice, however, in 1820 and 1824, did the General Conferences endorse the principle of the incompetency of the General Conference to pass finally upon the constitutionality of its own acts, and of a suspensive veto to be exercised by the Bishops or by the Annual Conferences. It will be noticed that the measure of Messrs. Pierce and Winans, adopted in 1824, was a distinct advance upon the action of 1820. It still permitted a two-thirds majority of the General Conference to pass a measure over the veto of the Bishops. But in case the measure should obtain a smaller majority than two-thirds, when returned to the General Conference with the constitutional objections of the Bishops, if the Bishops persisted in their objections, the proposed legislation was to be submitted to the Annual Conferences, whose decision by a majority vote should be final. Thus was the proper tribunal for an appeal at last partially recognized." (J. J. Tigert, D. D., "Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism," Nashville, 1894, p. 355.)

In view of the act of a bishop declaring to the General Conference of 1820 that one of its actions was unconstitutional, and in view of the statements of Doctor Tigert, afterward a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, it will be proper to cite the opinion of one of the greatest jurists who ever sat on the episcopal bench of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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Bishop Merrill, in an article in the *New York Christian Advocate*, March 24, 1892, prior to the General Conference of that year, said:

“There are, however, some laws in the Church which the General Conference did not make, and which it can not unmake or modify. When these are involved, what is the duty of the Bishop? The rule which inhibits him as president of the law-making body from deciding questions of law can not apply where a proposed action appears to him to be an infringement of the Constitution. Is he powerless to arrest such proposed action? Must he become a party to a violation of the fundamental law? Has he no right to interpose his own judgment, so far, at least, as to stay proceedings till the question of constitutionality is decided? Suppose he is not the final authority in determining the question, may he not demand a formal investigation and decision before he is required to submit the matter to a vote in the General Conference? . . .

“Suppose a motion is made which plainly contravenes a restrictive rule. In the hurry or excitement of the hour the members of the body do not catch the bearings of the motion in that respect, and no point of order is raised. Must the president entertain the motion, knowing it to be unlawful? He would be derelict of duty if he saw that it was in conflict with the rules of order and did not promptly refuse to entertain it. Must he be less watchful in guarding the Constitution than in upholding the rules of order? Is



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his power complete in the less important case, and utterly wanting in the more important? . . . Turn the matter over and look at it on every side, and each additional view will strengthen the conviction that a motion to do an unlawful thing is never in order in the General Conference, and that the president, who is bound to maintain the rules of order, is also bound, by the nature of his office as a Bishop in the Church, to protect the Constitution from infraction by refusing to entertain a motion that he believes to be unlawful under that instrument. His obligation in this regard is as high as his obligation to preside and enforce the rules of order.”

The opinion of this great Methodist Episcopal bishop is certainly worthy of respect. But even if his view were accepted, that would not make the bishop the final authority, and so the final and absolute authority would not be regarded as in the bishop or in the Board of Bishops, but that the bishop or bishops could check action until the question was properly investigated and legally decided by a competent authority.

It is well understood that a bishop presiding over an Annual Conference can refuse to put a motion that is illegal or unconstitutional, and Bishop Merrill's claim is that in the General Conference it is the right and duty of the bishop to call attention to an unconstitutional proposition presented to that body.

When one considers the nature of the system and the great work to be done by a bishop, he will

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find it difficult to discover in the episcopate of the Methodist Episcopal Church any undue or unnecessary power that should be or could be reduced.

The power is needed somewhere. If the bishops did not have it, who should have it, and what other individuals could use it to greater advantage to the Church and with better results?

The powers of a bishop are fixed by the Constitution, and the laws of the Church, made in harmony with that Constitution, and it is the duty of the bishop to use the power vested in him in meeting his grave responsibilities.

Whatever they are, these things the bishop is authorized and commanded to do, and he can not fairly be found fault with for doing what the law compels him to do, or for doing anything within its mandate or even its permission.

As a matter of fact, there is only about one thing that a bishop can do that the public regards of any great moment, and that is the making of an appointment of a preacher, but for more than a century no other system of pastoral assignment has worked better, or as well, for both ministers and Churches.

Is such a power of appointment too great? In what particular is it too great? It would be exceedingly difficult for any one who has mastered the philosophy and the practical necessities of the ecclesiastical system to point to anything in which the authority could justly be called too great.

Its parallel may be found in free governments



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outside the Church. Indeed, in all governments the power of appointment must be lodged somewhere. Even under the most democratic governments such delegated authority must be employed; it may be in a president, a governor, a general, or a judge. Somebody must decide and direct.

Then, besides the legal restraints, there are many checks on this power; for example, the bishop's regard for his own reputation and his ambition to do his best; respect for just or unjust criticisms that may be evoked; the desire for the prosperity of the Church; his recognition of mutual rights on all sides; and, above all, his conscience and the judgment of God. These and other things hold the bishop in check, and the Church is not likely to choose men in whose judgment it has not confidence.

It is to be remembered that whatever power the bishop had in 1808 he has to-day, but what he has to-day is much less than the bishops had in the early years of the Church's history.

It is also to be remembered that many things which are commonly called powers are really duties and responsibilities.

It is the duty of the bishop to travel at large throughout the work, it is his duty to oversee the spiritual and temporal interests of the Church, it is his duty to arrange the work, it is his duty to form the districts according to his judgment, it is his duty to fix the appointments of the presiding elders and other preachers, it is his duty to rule on questions of law subject to an appeal, and so

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with various other things; but these things are responsibilities and duties, rather than powers, and so the old Disciplines asked: "What is the bishop's duty?" or, "What are the duties of a bishop?" or, as the present Discipline says, "The duties of a Bishop are," etc.

Even if all these things may be spoken of as powers, the bishop has little actual power in view of his vast and varied responsibilities, and, even the power the bishop has he does not exercise without inquiry, consultation, and reflection.

The bishop holds an executive position. It is his duty to see that the laws and orders of the General Conference are executed and that the Constitution of the Church is respected and obeyed. It is his duty to plan and to superintend, but to perform these duties he should be clothed with an authority commensurate with his responsibility, and it is to the interest of the Church to maintain the dignity of the office by sustaining the bishop when he exercises the functions of his office according to the law of the Church. The bishop is a superintendent, and to superintend he must have some authority and must have ability to use it.

A weak executive anywhere is to be deprecated, but a weak episcopate, when charged with such grave responsibilities, means disaster in every department of the Church. The private in the ranks well may tremble when his general is a coward and does not take the responsibility which belongs to his position, and the rank and

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file of the ministry, and the laity also; may well be apprehensive if the bishop is too timid or vacillating or man-pleasing to shoulder his responsibility and do what he knows should be done and what the best interests of the Church require. The danger is not from strong bishops, but from weak bishops. But strong bishops may be as gentle and considerate as weak bishops, and even more so.

A bishop is not merely an ornamental figure, but a superintendent to direct. In the Church militant he is a general to plan, to marshal the forces, and even to command. A bishop is chosen to do certain things, and he ought to perform the duties he is elected to discharge.

A bishop, therefore, should be an intelligent man with keen perceptions that will enable him to comprehend men and conditions; he should be an open-minded and broad-minded man, willing to receive information and quick to see the relation of many forces and interests; he should be a conscientious man and sensitively so, even to an extreme; he should be a man of calm judgment who can discriminate between men and Churches, and not be swayed by personal influence; he should be a courageous man who will dare to do the right regardless of self-interest or of personal cost to himself, and who will plan the work and make the appointments without fear or favor; and he should be considerate, sympathetic, judicious, and just—a fearless ecclesiastical executive with a warm heart, a keen eye, and a cool head.

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Such a bishop will be fair to all and will inspire confidence in all who understand him and his difficult task. Like soldiers under a competent and brave general, ministers and people will trust themselves to a real bishop with such qualities, will rally to his support, and follow him to victory.

It is for the Church to develop such bishops by encouraging and supporting the bishop who faithfully does his duty in harmony with the law of the Church.

Bishops have authority but not overmuch authority, when the nature of their work is considered. They are superintendents, but without power they could not superintend. They have authority, and must have authority, but the authority is hedged in by many safeguards.

CHAPTER XV

THE AMENABILITY OF THE BISHOPS



## CHAPTER XV

### THE AMENABILITY OF THE BISHOPS

EVERYBODY in the Church is amenable to some authority, and to this rule the bishops are no exception.

At the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church the bishops were declared amenable to "the body of ministers and preachers." Thus the first "Minutes," published in 1785, just after the adjournment of the organizing Conference, has this paragraph:

"Therefore, at this Conference we formed ourselves into an Independent Church; and following the counsel of Mr. John Wesley, who recommended the Episcopal mode of Church government, we thought it best to become an Episcopal Church, making the Episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent or bishop amenable to the body of ministers and preachers." (Minutes of Conferences, New York, edition of 1813, p. 51.)

This presents the original law which made a bishop amenable to the body of the ministry, the primary source of ecclesiastical power in the new Church. This was long before the creation of a delegated General Conference and before there was a quadrennial General Conference or any such body meeting at stated intervals.

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In the first Book of Discipline agreed upon at the organizing Conference, the law read:

“*Quest.* 27. To whom is the Superintendent amenable for his conduct?

“*Ans.* To the Conference: who have power to expel him for improper conduct, if they see it necessary.” (First Discipline, published in 1785.)

This meant the body of the ministry in Conference assembled, for the sovereign power of the Church at that time was in that body.

In 1787 the word superintendent was changed to bishop, and the question read, “To whom is the bishop amenable?” but the answer remained the same.

In 1792 the law was slightly modified by inserting the word general before Conference, so that it stood:

“*Quest.* To whom is the Bishop amenable for his conduct?

“*Ans.* To the General Conference, who shall have power to expel him for improper conduct if they see it necessary.”

This year the quadrennial General Conference was established and the title was changed to harmonize with this new development in the polity of the Church, but the General Conference, which was to meet statedly once in four years, was still the body of the ministry in the Conferences that met every year, for the General Conference in that time was made up of “All the travelling Preachers” in the several Conferences which met once a year. Thus the bishop, as at the begin-



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ning, was still amenable "to the body of ministers and preachers." In other words, the original General Conference was the assembled ministry of the Conferences which met each year, and the bishop became amenable to this ministry so assembled at one time and in one place once in four years.

That for which the bishops were amenable was, as the law states, "improper conduct." That, of course, includes moral conduct. The bishop was not amenable for every imaginable thing, but he was amenable for "improper conduct." The word "expel" suggests that the "improper conduct" was something of a very serious character and would seem to refer to moral conduct and to mean "improper conduct" amounting to an immorality, for it was for that kind of conduct persons could be expelled from the Church.

In 1789 the Discipline contained the following: "What shall be done when an Elder, Deacon, or Preacher is under report of being guilty of some capital crime expressly forbidden in the Word of God as an unchristian practice, sufficient to exclude a person from the Kingdom of grace and glory and to make him a subject of wrath and hell?"

This throws some light upon the view of that time as to what was considered grave enough to justify expulsion.

In 1792 a new law was enacted in answer to the question, "What provision shall be made for

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the trial of an immoral Bishop in the interval of the General Conference?" and this new law provided for the trial of a bishop when a General Conference was not in session, and gave the court called together under this law "authority to suspend the Bishop till the ensuing General Conference." Then the case would be heard and decided by that body.

But the General Conference of to-day is not absolute in reference to the episcopacy. When the Constitution was adopted and the new kind of General Conference was created, the delegated General Conference was not the same as the original General Conference, which was "the body of the ministers and preachers," and was not the same as the quadrennial General Conference of 1792 and the others down to and including 1808, which contained "the body of the ministry" or the membership of the Annual Conferences. From the adoption of the Constitution of 1808, which called into being another kind of General Conference, the body of the ministry remained in the Annual Conferences, and reserved and preserved a portion of their original and sovereign power, as, for example, in its control over the Constitution to which the delegated General Conference was subject.

The body of the ministry continued to exist with reserved sovereign power which could be exerted under certain circumstances, and the General Conference itself is not an irresponsible body in any absolute sense, but, like the bishop, is under

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the Constitution and under the statute laws made in harmony with the Constitution, which is over the entire Church and all who are in it, and hence the General Conference in considering the episcopacy or the bishops, individually or collectively, must have regard to the Constitution and to the episcopacy existing and acting under the Constitution.

Under the Constitution the episcopacy, as such, was not and is not amenable or subject to the General Conference. That was put beyond the control of this delegated and quadrennial body, but the individual bishops were and are amenable to the General Conference and might be brought under the scrutiny of that body for failure to obey the constitutional law of the Church. Thus there is a distinction between the episcopacy as a department of the Church and a bishop who administers the episcopate.

While the General Conference, in exercising this scrutiny, must have respect for the protection which the Constitution gives the episcopacy, and gives the individual bishop, the bishop himself must remember that, under solemn vows and under his conscience, he is subject to the Constitution and the statute law of the Church made in conformity to that Constitution. The bishops are, first, to have regard for the Constitution and, secondly, to the existing law under that Constitution. The Constitution is over both bishops and General Conferences, and both bishop and General Conferences are under the authority and

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command of the Constitution, for the government is not irresponsible, but constitutional.

The General Conference can not command or do as it pleases in everything, any more than the bishops can follow their own will or impulse in everything, regardless of any other authority. It is under the Constitution and must conform to its requirements as regards the bishops and all others in the Church.

The old law as to the amenability of a bishop remained precisely the same from 1792 down to 1872, a period of eighty years. At that time the question form was abandoned, and the answer, "To the General Conference, who shall have power to expel him for improper conduct if they see it necessary," became, "A Bishop is answerable for his conduct to the General Conference, which shall have power to order the manner of his trial."

A bishop is amenable for his moral conduct, and the law just quoted refers to questions of character, which may require a trial. At present this law is found in "Part VI" of the Book of Discipline, which treats of "Judicial Administration," and is the first paragraph in "Chapter I," on the "Trial of a Bishop," (Book of Discipline, ¶223, ed. 1908), and there immediately follows the provision for the investigation of an accused bishop, and for the trial of an accused bishop before a Judicial Conference. Then, in a paragraph with the caption, "Appeal of Bishop," is the statement that, "A Bishop shall have the right

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of Appeal to the ensuing General Conference.” (Book of Discipline, 1908, ¶277.)

The relation of the law and the language of the law in paragraphs 223 and 224 show that the law refers to a judicial investigation or trial for immorality, imprudent conduct of an immoral nature, or heresy, and not ordinary complaints. Such judicial inquiries are to take place outside the General Conference, but may on appeal be brought into that body, for if there is an adverse finding in the lower court, which is a Judicial Conference, “A Bishop shall have the right of Appeal to the ensuing General Conference.” Then the General Conference, as an appellate court, considers the case.

All this is “When a Bishop is accused of immoral conduct,” (Discipline, 1908, ¶224), or “imprudent conduct,” (Discipline, 1908, ¶227), or “When a Bishop disseminates, publicly or privately, doctrines which are contrary to our Articles of Religion or established standards of doctrine.” (Discipline, 1908, ¶229.)

For conduct or misconduct of such a character there must be the formal court and the formal trial.

Further, a bishop is amenable to the General Conference for the observance of constitutional requirements in his official administration. If in his episcopal administration he violates the law or disregards the law he can be compelled to explain or answer for that.

But a bishop is not amenable for what the law

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orders or permits him to do. When the law commands him to do a certain thing, he would be amenable for not obeying the law, but he can not be taken to task for acting under the law and doing what the law directs him to do. So, where the law gives him discretion or permission to do a thing, a bishop can not be held answerable for using his judgment and acting within his discretionary authority. Such latitude has been necessary for executive officers in every sphere, and the officer is permitted and expected to act within that limit of discretion. In the same way, the bishop having been granted discretionary power by the Constitution and the law made in harmony with that Constitution, is free and in duty bound to exercise his discretion, and, having done so, he can not be taken to task by the General Conference for having done so.

The episcopate is protected by the Constitution and by the law and usage of the Church.

Every thorough student of the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church must admit that there is something inherent in its episcopacy.

First, there is something in the very idea and essential nature of the episcopate; second, in "the Plan of our itinerant General Superintendency;" third, in the settled usage of the episcopacy from its early years; fourth, in the purpose covered by the Constitution; and fifth, in what has been conferred on the episcopate from time to time before the adoption of the Constitution and since

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in the effort to carry out the principles plainly involved in the Constitution of the Church.

Such things are involved in the very office itself under the Constitution, and can not be touched by a General Conference, and when a bishop acts in harmony with these things and according to his constitutional rights, or even under provisions made by the General Conference, the General Conference can not take him to task for doing, though it might do so if he failed to conform to any of these things.

The General Conference itself acts under the Constitution when it comes to view the administration of a bishop, as when it performs any other act. Hence it has no right to expect or demand from a bishop more than the constitutional law requires, and it has no right to take a bishop to task or to censure him when his administration is within the limits of the constitutional law, and, of course, it can not make an *ex post facto* law to affect a particular case, or to make a case against a bishop.

There are various things which a bishop may do which are not subject to revision, reversion, or change. For example, there are things in his executive work, such as arranging the work, forming the districts, fixing the time for the meeting of the Annual Conferences; making the appointments of the preachers, including the presiding elders or district superintendents; and other acts of superintendence which are not subject to re-



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vision and change by any other authority, because these things are implied in the enduement of the episcopacy and are recognized and protected by the Constitution.

Hence a General Conference can not change an appointment regularly and legally made by a bishop, and can not pass upon the nature or fitness of such an appointment legally made by a bishop, because it is within his constitutional power and duty to "fix the appointments," because he is elected for and commanded to do that kind of work, and the making of the appointments is legally and constitutionally left to the bishop's discretion.

A bishop is amenable, not for doing what the law authorized him to do, but for not doing what the law required him to do, and, if the bishop exercised his discretion, when the law gave him discretionary power, no authority in the Church can call him to account and pass an adverse judgment. The one thing the General Conference can consider is whether the bishop has or has not kept within the law, for a bishop is not amenable when he has complied with the law.

The making of the appointments is the bishop's right, his responsibility, and his duty. The law commands him to "fix the appointments," and in doing so he must be free to exercise his own judgment as a general in the midst of a battle, or a judge on the bench, or a chief executive in the State or the Nation.

Having exercised his judgment within his dis-



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cretionary power, he can not, in law or equity, be taken to task, any more than the President or a judge could be held answerable for making appointments which the law empowered him to make.

The General Conference can consider whether a bishop has violated or gone beyond the law, but if the bishop was within his legal rights and had not violated the law, the General Conference can not pass upon the wisdom or merit of the appointment itself. That, under the law, is a matter for the godly judgment of the bishop. If the bishop's administration was within the law, then the bishop has not transgressed and is not liable. On the other hand, if the bishop has gone contrary to the law, then he should be held to a strict responsibility.

Complaints of every imaginable sort are not to be encouraged, but to be discouraged. All should know the principles which determine whether a complaint is legitimate or not. The dignity of the office and the honor of the Church require that complaints which are merely forms of fault-finding growing out of personal resentment or prejudice shall be discountenanced, but every proper complaint is to be considered with fairness and given such consideration as it fairly deserves.

The General Conference should not entertain a complaint unless it is really actionable; otherwise irresponsible persons might appear without any legitimate cause and without any real case,

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and in an irregular way injure a bishop, waste the time of the body, and damage the reputation of the denomination.

In matters relating to administration a bishop should not and can not be taken to task in an informal or irregular manner. The complaint must not be mere rumor, or merely general and indefinite statements, for, according to the principles of law and equity, the bishop should not be asked or compelled to face the indefinite any more than the humblest member of the Church. To have to do so would be inequitable, and would not be tolerated in the case of any minister or member. Much more, because of his high position and what it may mean to the Church, it should not be tolerated in the case of a bishop.

The complaint should not only be definite, with specifications in support of the particular allegation, but it should also be formulated in a precise manner. It should be something definite, in such a definite form that to it can be given a definite answer. Further, the complaint should be in writing, and the written document should precisely state the point or points involved. This is necessary for exactness, that misapprehension may be avoided, and that, if necessary, it may be made a matter of record.

Then the bishop concerned should be served with a copy of such written complaint at a reasonable time prior to the session of the General Conference so that the bishop to which it refers will have a reasonable amount of time in which to pre-

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pare his answer. The bishop is entitled to this on general and universally recognized principles, and because he may need some time to secure documents bearing on the case, or to summon individuals whose testimony would tend to justify him in the matter involved. Manifestly it would be unfair to allow complainants to come with a well-prepared accusation and, perhaps, witnesses to support it, while the bishop was allowed to come to the Conference without having received the written complaint with the specifications, and without having had time to consider and fully prepare his defense.

The law of the Church recognizes this principle when it says:

“Complaint against the administration of a Bishop may be forwarded to the General Conference, and entertained there; *provided*, that in its judgment he has had due notice that such complaint would be made.”

The intention of this law is to forbid sudden complaints, and is a prohibition of accusations suddenly sprung and which are calculated to take the bishop by surprise. It is also against complaints which are not duly and finally formulated, for a complaint that is not definite and supported by clear specifications is not a legal complaint in form for action. The phrase in the law, “may be forwarded to the General Conference,” implies that it is in written and permanent form, and that it is that formulation that is to be considered, and that nothing else is to be considered.

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That is what the Conference is to act upon, and that exact formulation and nothing else is what the bishop is to meet.

If the complaint is not specific and in proper form, or has not been duly served upon the bishop at a reasonable time before the proposed hearing or the session of the General Conference, it should not be entertained by that body. That is the law, and as a matter of justice and good order the General Conference owes it to itself and the Church to discountenance hasty, indefinite, and miscellaneous allegations against its chief pastors.

The function of the General Conference is to consider a question that has been duly raised, or a case formally stated, and in compliance with the law and the principles of equity. When all the requirements are met, then it is to consider whether the thing is actionable; that is to say, whether the bishop has or has not kept within the law. If the bishop has kept within the constitutional law governing him, then there is no actionable offense, and the complaint should be dismissed before time is wasted in hearing a matter which, even if true, is not an actionable offense.

It may be repeated that as long as a bishop is within his constitutional rights, he can not be arraigned for his action and no censure or other penalty can be inflicted upon him. It would be cruel, illegal, absurd, and destructive of executive authority for a General Conference to censure him for that which the law commanded or permitted him to do.

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Because a preacher did not get the Church he wanted or a Church did not get the preacher it desired would, for example, be no ground for complaint against the bishop who made the appointment, because under the Constitution and the law it has been made his duty "to fix the appointments of the preachers." Hence the complaint would not be actionable and should be dismissed without hearing what might be said on one side or the other.

The General Conference, being under the same Constitution that is over the bishops, would thus respect the Constitution which created and sustains it.

Nothing should be permitted to be brought and entertained against a bishop that springs from personal antagonism, disappointed ambition, or from dissatisfaction because the bishop did not give the complainant or his friends certain desired appointments. If it were understood that such things could be heard, it would tend to the destruction of the freedom of the appointing power, and that would be as disastrous as the destruction of the independence of a judge in our courts.

While a bishop should avoid every form of offense, and so maintain the honor of the Church, it is the duty of the Church to defend its bishops from illegal, foolish, and un-Christly assaults, and, when a bishop courageously does his duty under the law, to approve his conduct and rebuke the lawless who would injure the Church. An un-

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coerced episcopacy is as necessary as an uncoerced judiciary.

When a case is made against a bishop, he has the right and should be permitted to be present and to hear all that may be said against him from the beginning to the end of the proceedings, and he should have abundant liberty to file objections and to take exceptions, and to answer personally or by representatives, or in both ways.

Further, the proceedings should be conducted in an orderly manner so as to protect the rights of all parties.

When the point is reached where the body, or the committee, if the case is heard in committee, is to weigh the evidence and make a finding, then those who have been taking part in prosecuting or sustaining the complaint should withdraw, and even if they are members of the body or of the committee they should not speak or vote in making the decision. To stay and do so would not be allowed in a civil or a criminal court, and much less should it be allowed in an ecclesiastical body. Even in a legislative body a member does not vote on his own case, where he is a party to the case, or where he has been related to it in any direct manner.

Frequently in General Conferences members have declined to help make the decision because of some relation to the case in question, and they have been excused. For formal or informal prosecutors to sit as a jury in making up a verdict is most unseemly and inequitable. If the complained

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of bishop must withdraw, then the prosecutors or sustainers of the complaint, though they be members of the body, should likewise withdraw.

Furthermore, when there is a complaint against a bishop, he should not only have the right to defend himself before the committee before it reaches a finding, but he has the right to defend himself before the General Conference acts on the report of the committee, for there is no legal decision until the General Conference itself votes upon and decides the case. The bishop has a right to speak on the matter to the General Conference before its final decision.

That is good law and Christian equity, and the principle was recognized in the General Conference of 1844, when the case of Bishop Andrew was pending. Then the bishop was conceded the right to address the General Conference in his own defense, which he did more than once and at great length.

Every bishop is amenable, but it is due the Church and the high rank of the episcopate that the bishop shall have all his rights recognized and that he shall be defended as far as possible from unnecessary complaints and unjust criticisms. On the other hand, every proper case should be fairly heard.





CHAPTER XVI  
EFFECTIVE AND NON-EFFECTIVE  
BISHOPS



## CHAPTER XVI

### EFFECTIVE AND NON-EFFECTIVE BISHOPS

It is possible for a bishop to become so old and so feeble mentally and physically that he is unable to perform the duties that pertain to the episcopal office. Few bishops in the Methodist Episcopal Church have ever reached that state, though some have been in the office more than thirty years, while many have died before they have reached great age.

But if any should become so very old and so very feeble, what should be done? Of course they should not be taxed beyond their ability with arduous labors, and of course they should be honored for the work they have done, and their high office should be respected.

That bishops had a right to use judgment in regard to the amount of labor, particularly when health and strength were concerned, had always been recognized, and, in 1812, the General Conference said:

“We conceive it to be a case in which our bishops should exercise their own discretion; and, should circumstances make it necessary for them to curtail their labors, it will be for the succeeding General Conference to approve the same.”  
(Gen. Conf. Journal, 1812, p. 115.)

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In the case of Bishop McKendree, the General Conference of 1820 said:

“Your committee further report that they have regarded with deep and affectionate concern the declining health and strength of our senior superintendent. Worn down by long, extensive, and faithful labors in the service of God and the Church, your committee feel a solicitude, which they doubt not is equally felt by the Conference, that every practicable provision may be made for his relief and comfort; hoping that by a provident forbearance for a time from his arduous labors and weighty cares, the Church may yet, at some future period, through the kindness of a gracious Providence, have the benefit of his very desirable services and counsels. They therefore submit the following resolution:

“*Resolved*, by the delegates of the Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, 1. That it is the wish and desire of this General Conference that Bishop McKendree, during the continuance of his afflictions and debility, should travel in such directions or remain in such places as he may judge most conducive to his own health and comfort; and that he be accordingly, at the close of this General Conference, respectfully and affectionately requested so to do.

“*Resolved*, etc., 2. That whenever Bishop McKendree shall think himself able, it is the wish and desire of this General Conference that he should continue, so far as his health may prudently admit of it, the exercise of his episcopal

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functions and superintending care.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1820, pp. 201, 202.)

That is an illustration of the way the General Conferences of that period treated a bishop in broken health. Bishop McKendree had then been in the episcopal office twelve years.

At the General Conference of 1832, when Bishop McKendree had been a bishop for twenty-four years and was in bad health, the Conference took him kindly into consideration. One who was present at that Conference says of the bishop at that time:

“He was too feeble to attend constantly the sessions, but occasionally would be seen walking up the aisle and taking a seat by the side of his colleagues, but would remain in the room a short time only. His last visit to the Conference was made the day before the adjournment. Having remained as long as his strength would allow, he arose to retire. He was but too conscious of his approaching dissolution to expect ever to meet his brethren again in another General Conference. Leaning on his staff, his once tall and manly form now bent with age and infirmity, his eyes suffused with tears, his voice faltering with emotion, he exclaimed: ‘Let all things be done without strife or vainglory, and try to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. *My brethren and children, love one another.* Then, spreading both his trembling hands, and raising his eyes to heaven, he pronounced in faltering and affectionate accents the apostolic benediction. Slowly and

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sadly he left the house to return no more.” (Quoted in Paine’s “Life of McKendree,” Nashville, edition 1885, pp. 451, 452.)

Bishop Robert Paine tells that “the whole assembly rose and stood till he disappeared.” (Paine’s “Life of McKendree,” p. 452.)

Now, notwithstanding the fact that Bishop McKendree was more than seventy-five years of age and completely broken down in health at this time, the General Conference of 1832 did not pronounce him to be no longer effective and place him on a non-effective list, but on the 23d of May it adopted a report of the Committee on the Episcopacy, as follows:

“In consequence of the age and increased infirmities of our venerable and beloved Bishop McKendree, it is recommended that his present relation be continued, and that the sum of \$250 be allowed him annually for extra expenses, and to defray the expenses of a travelling companion, and that he be authorized to draw this amount from the Book Concern.” (General Conference Journal, 1832, p. 408.)

So he was continued in the effective relation in spite of his feebleness, and he lived until March 5, 1835, nearly three years longer.

It was the custom, when a bishop signified that he felt that he had become too feeble to do full work as a bishop, for the General Conference to pass a resolution requesting that he continue to do such work as he might be able to perform.

Thus, in 1844, in the case of Bishop Hedding,

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the General Conference of that year adopted the following:

“Whereas, Bishop Hedding has signified to this General Conference his doubts whether he will be able to do all the work of an effective Superintendent during the four years to come; therefore,

“*Resolved*, That he be not required to do more than in his judgment he shall be able.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1844, p. 146.)

Even in later years, when a bishop became too enfeebled, on account of advancing years or permanently broken health, to do full episcopal service, the General Conference requested the Board of Bishops to give him no more work to do than the bishop was able comfortably to perform.

In 1864 the amount of episcopal service the venerable Bishop Morris should render was “left to his judgment and that of his episcopal colleagues,” (General Conference Journal, 1864), and in passing upon his case the General Conference adopted very appreciative resolutions.

In the first place, Bishop Thomas A. Morris, having completed a “half century of ministerial service,” preached his semi-centennial sermon, in response to complimentary resolutions offered by Dr. Edward Thomson, who at that session was himself elected a bishop.

Later in the session the Committee on Episcopacy unanimously reported the following, which were adopted by the Conference:

“*Whereas*, Our honored and beloved senior su-

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perintendent, Rev. Thomas A. Morris, has for nearly half a century rendered valuable and effective service in various important relations to the Church, and for nearly thirty years has officiated acceptably and usefully as a general superintendent; *and whereas*, his advanced age demands a respite from his arduous labors; therefore,

“*Resolved*, That whether Bishop Morris shall continue to travel and perform episcopal duties during the next quadrennial term, and if so, to what extent, shall be left to his judgment and that of his episcopal colleagues.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1864, p. 356.)

In 1868 it was left entirely to “his own judgment.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1868.) That General Conference passed the following in respect to Bishop Morris:

“*Resolved*, That Bishop Morris be released from any obligation to exercise his episcopal office beyond what his own judgment may dictate.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1868, p. 224.)

At this time Bishop Morris had been a bishop for thirty-two years.

At the same General Conference of 1868 it was *resolved*: “That Bishop Baker be allowed to make such arrangements with his episcopal colleagues to do such work, and such only, as his health and the providence of God may allow.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1868, p. 224.)

These facts show that down to a very recent period the General Conferences had no thought of



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making any distinction between the young and vigorous bishops and the venerable bishops who had lost health and strength and were no longer able to render the service they performed in their early years. No matter how old or feeble the bishop might be, he was venerated and treated gently and permitted to retain his old rank.

It was not until the General Conference of 1872 that a General Conference applied the term "non-effective" to a bishop. The General Conference of 1864 had lightened the work of Bishop Morris, who then had been in ministerial life about half a century. In 1868 the General Conference left it entirely to him how much or how little he would do, and now, after Bishop Thomas A. Morris had been a minister about fifty-eight years, and a bishop for thirty-six years, the General Conference of 1872 pronounced him a "non-effective" bishop, passing the following:

*"Whereas*, The General Conferences of 1864 and 1868 did release our venerable senior Bishop T. A. Morris from all episcopal supervision and duty; and,

*"Whereas*, This General Conference by its action directs that the Episcopacy be denominated effective and non-effective; therefore, be it

*"Resolved*, That the venerable Bishop, T. A. Morris, be placed on the non-effective list." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1872, p. 437.)

[It is said that to this day the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has never superannuated a bishop, or declared one "non-effective," unless at his own request.]

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In 1872 there was inserted in the Book of Discipline for the first time the following law:

“The General Conference shall determine which of the Bishops are effective and which are non-effective.”

Up to that time there had been no such Disciplinary classification of bishops, and for two quadrenniums after that no bishop was classified as “non-effective.”

The General Conference of 1880 took the following action in regard to the Senior Bishop, who had been in the episcopal office twenty-eight years:

“*Whereas*, Bishop Levi Scott is compelled by feebleness and age to retire from the effective labor of the superintendency; therefore,

“*Resolved*, 1. That we hereby express our appreciation of his eminent services to the Church as an executive officer, a preacher of the Gospel, and a Christian minister.

“*Resolved*, 2. That we will continue our prayers for his health and prosperity, and that his life in retirement may be crowned by the constant favor of God.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1880, pp. 363, 364.)

The same General Conference also passed the following resolution: “That the venerable Senior Bishop, Levi Scott, be returned on the list as ‘non-effective.’ ”

In the case of Bishop Simpson, who for some time had been disabled by “severe illness,” and who died in 1884, the General Conference of that

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year, instead of superannuating or retiring him, passed a resolution, in which the Conference said:

“We recommend that the work of Bishop Simpson during the quadrennium be so arranged that he may be under no pressure, and may avail himself of temporary periods of rest at home, and of the benefits, if judged best by his physicians, of foreign travel without responsibility. At the same time, such work as he can do without injury will be most gladly and gratefully received by the Church.”

This resolution, which was part of a series, was signed by Oliver Hoyt, J. M. Buckley, John Lanahan, William F. Warren, Robert E. Pattison, and John Evans, a most representative list of ministers and laymen.

Bishop Simpson had been a bishop for thirty-two years, and was critically ill at the time, and yet the General Conference made no attempt to take him from the regular list of bishops and classify him as non-effective, but in the most complimentary way continued him in his old rank as a full bishop.

Twelve years more passed before another bishop was changed from the effective relation. Indeed, from 1880 to 1896, a period of sixteen years, no bishop was declared “non-effective” or superannuated.

In the General Conference of 1896 Bishop Thomas Bowman and Bishop Randolph S. Foster, who had been bishops for twenty-four years, and were advanced in years, were passed from the

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effective to the non-effective list, and, notwithstanding their long service and their increasing years, their transference from the effective rank caused a considerable sensation in the Church and beyond.

In 1896 the General Conference adopted the following, which had been reported by the Committee on Episcopacy:

“The Committee begs leave to report that, after the most careful and sympathetic consideration, in its judgment the senior Bishop, Thomas Bowman, and Bishop Randolph S. Foster are unable longer to endure the protracted strain, continuous responsibility, and almost constant travel imposed by the office of Bishop, and therefore regretfully recommends that at the close of the present General Conference they be returned on the list as non-effective.” (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1896, p. 379.)

Another quadrennium passed without the relation of any bishop being changed, then another quadrennium rolled around and brought the General Conference of 1904, and that body made certain noted changes.

In the General Conference of 1904 the law of 1872 was changed by striking out “non-effective” and substituting “superannuated,” and now reads: “The General Conference shall determine which of the Bishops are Effective and which are Superannuated.” (Discipline, 1908, ¶301.)

This new law defining the status of “A Superannuated General Superintendent” or “A Super-

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annuated Bishop," which in the Book of Discipline for 1904 appeared as section 2 of paragraph 285, under the head of "Support of Bishops," in the Book of Discipline for 1908 was made a chapter by itself under the caption "Superannuated Bishops," following the chapter on "Bishops." (Discipline, 1908, ¶¶201, 202.)

The title "Superannuated Bishop" and the title "Superannuated General Superintendent" had never before appeared in the law of the Church, and the change, read in the light of other events, was most momentous.

This new act of the General Conference of 1904 read:

"A Superannuated General Superintendent is relieved from the obligation to travel through the Connection at large, and may choose the place of his residence. He shall not be assigned to the Presidency of Annual Conferences nor make appointments; but, if requested by a Bishop presiding, he may take the chair temporarily in a General or Annual Conference; and, at the request of the Bishop presiding in the Annual Conference, he may ordain candidates previously elected to orders.

"A Superannuated Bishop shall be an advisory member of the Board of Bishops; and his name shall be printed with the signatures of Bishops in the introduction to the Discipline, the Hymnal, and the Journal of the General Conference. He shall also be a member of the different Boards and General Committees of which Bishops are *ex of-*

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*ficio* members, and may also preside over the General Conference standing Committee on Boundaries." (Book of Discipline, 1908, ¶¶201, 202.)

Some regarded this action as defective, but whatever may be considered its defects, it at least made it clear that "A Superannuated Bishop is a Bishop still," though with greatly diminished authority.

At this General Conference (1904) Bishop Stephen M. Merrill, who had been a bishop thirty-two years, was in the fifty-ninth year of his ministry and in the seventy-ninth year of his life, requested that he be superannuated. In doing so he made a detailed statement as to his ministry and as to his idea of superannuation, in which he said: "It is understood that a superannuated Bishop is a Bishop still," and in closing said: "My request is that a superannuated relation be granted to me, to begin after the final adjournment of this General Conference" (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1904, pp. 191-193), and the Conference granted the request.

The General Conference also superannuated five other bishops without their requesting superannuation. They were: Bishop Edward G. Andrews, who had been an effective bishop for thirty-two years; Bishop Cyrus D. Foss, who had been in the office twenty-four years; Bishop John M. Walden, who had been a bishop twenty years; Bishop Willard F. Mallalieu, who had been in the office twenty years; and Bishop John H. Vincent,

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who had been an effective bishop for sixteen years.

Opinions differed as to this comprehensive action. The majority of the General Conference approved, as the vote showed, but many throughout the Church were shocked by such a removal of bishops from the effective ranks.

The words effective and effectiveness have a definite meaning in the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and always have had a well-understood meaning in the law and practice of its ecclesiastical system.

Ministers who are members of an Annual Conference are classified as Effective, Supernumerary, or Superannuated preachers.

An effective minister is one who is physically and mentally able to perform the duty of an active minister.

A supernumerary preacher is one who is temporarily disabled from performing the full work of an active minister, but who may, and it is hoped will, recover his health and strength, or be relieved of the impediment, and return to the effective ranks. So the present law reads:

“A Supernumerary Minister is one who, because of impaired health or other equally sufficient reason, is temporarily unable to perform full work.” (Book of Discipline, 1908, ¶ 176.)

A superannuated preacher is a member of an Annual Conference who has passed beyond the years of active service, and through the decay of great age, or by mental decay or physical disease,



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or hopeless impairment of a physical character, has become permanently and hopelessly so disabled that he can not perform the work of a preacher or pastor.

The same principles, properly understood, apply to a bishop, and to him the same test may be applied.

An effective preacher is one who is physically and intellectually able to do the work of a minister. So an effective bishop is one who is physically and mentally able to discharge the duties of his office. If he is thus able, he can not legally and truthfully be declared non-effective.

If, however, he is utterly broken down bodily; for example, if he has an incurable disease, or is hopelessly paralyzed, such a permanent impairment of physical health and strength would be a reason for regarding a bishop as non-effective.

Of, if he is utterly broken down mentally, in any of the forms of mental disease or the mental weakness that sometimes comes with very great age, this would be a reason for regarding a bishop as non-effective.

These are grounds for declaring a bishop to be non-effective. Other objections to the individual are to be considered in some other way under the law. But a bishop who is actually effective can not legally be declared non-effective. If he is effective so that he can perform his official duty, no vote could justly and legally make him non-effective, for that would be contrary to the fact.



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No other question can fairly be considered in this relation than lack of mental and physical ability to perform the work of a bishop.

If there are other questions, as, for example, questions as to character, they might be reasons for trial and expulsion, but not grounds for declaring an effective man to be non-effective. If there is an allegation of immorality or dishonesty or heresy or any conduct belonging to any of these classes, the law provides for a proper procedure leading to a formal trial for the specific offense, which trial may prove or disprove his guilt or his innocence.

Neither can non-effectiveness be demonstrated because somebody did not get the appointment he wanted for himself or his friend. Indeed, that very thing might be the best possible proof of the bishop's strong mentality and general efficiency.

But the case is made stronger by the fact that the present law does not use the term non-effective, but employs another word.

In 1904, as has been stated, there was inserted in the Book of Discipline the title "Superannuated Bishop." This was something new.

The law does not mention a Supernumerary Bishop, so it is understood that a bishop is either effective or superannuated, and that he remains effective until he is legally pronounced superannuated.

This word superannuated, as has already been shown, necessarily brings in the element of great age.

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It carries with it two particulars: first, that the bishop is of great age and beyond the years of possible efficiency; and second, that he is hopelessly broken down mentally and physically.

If not beyond the years of possible efficiency, and if not incapacitated in mind or body, the bishop is not superannuated and can not be truthfully said to be so, and there is no valid ground for superannuation.

The new phrase, a "superannuated bishop," puts the emphasis on great age, but a specified age does not prove superannuation. The calendar is not sufficient to determine. It is a question of vitality, spirit, and vigor. Some men are actually "older" at forty than others at sixty or beyond. Some are vigorous at fourscore years. A certain Annual Conference had an effective minister who, though beyond ninety years of age, was taking regular appointments and doing the work of a regular pastor. The Church has had effective bishops about or over eighty, and Wesley was an effective *episcopos*, or bishop, well into his eighty-eighth year.

The question is, Can the bishop do the work?

A soldier may be too old to do his work long before a bishop becomes too old to do his work, for the nature of the duty is very different. Usually a soldier has a bodily exposure that a bishop is not compelled to endure. Von Moltke was between seventy and eighty when he fought the Franco-Prussian War, and he remained the head of the German army years after that.

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Sometimes military officers are put on the retired list simply to allow younger officers to be promoted, not that they are not efficient; but this would hardly be a valid reason for the superannuation of an effective bishop. The Church of God is not supposed to be controlled by such a policy.

The physical standard of effectiveness for a bishop has changed in modern times because of changed conditions. In the early years the bishop rode on horseback, swam streams, wormed his way through forests, climbed mountains, and camped out wherever he might be, having few comforts and much exposure. This required robustness of the pioneer type and only a very strong man physically could endure it. These things have changed, travel is different and more comfortable, and there is less exposure. Because of this a bishop who, if he had lived in those more primitive times, might have become physically incapacitated comparatively early in life, can now continue effective many years longer.

Now and then individuals speak of "retiring a bishop," the "retirement of bishops," and of "retired bishops." These may be careless colloquialisms, but such phrases are not known in the law of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Under the law there is no such thing as "retiring bishops" or of "retired bishops." The legal word is "superannuated" with all that the word implies and the limitation it involves. It is not retirement for any one of a half-dozen reasons,

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but superannuation for the specific reason implied in the term and its long-time usage in the Annual Conferences. It is "superannuated" because the bishop is actually a "superannuate." Because nature has brought him to a superannuated state, he is technically declared to be what he has already become, "superannuated." The law knows no such thing as retirement for any other reason, or for no reason. There is no such thing as retiring bishops, but there is superannuation for those who are actually superannuated, and there can not be properly superannuation of a bishop who is not in himself superannuated.

In an Annual Conference it is a solemn moment when a minister is given a superannuated relation. The members appreciate what it means when a faithful preacher, after long years of service, leaves the effective ranks and becomes a superannuate. Clearly it should mean no less when the question of superannuating a bishop is being considered.

Then, when a venerable bishop, who for long years has performed the sacred functions of his high office, reaches the age of superannuation, it is a time for serious reflection and gentleness of action, and one who reads the history of the Church must be impressed by the delicate, tender, and considerate manner with which the Church in olden time regarded its bishops when they reached such a period in their lives. The real heart of the Church doubtless feels the same to-day.

When the question of the superannuation of a

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bishop arises, there is only one point to be considered and that is whether he has become superannuated. Any other thing—any criticism, complaint, or charge—must be taken up at some other time and in some other way, for which provision has been made in the law; but when the question is, Shall the bishop be superannuated? the only factors to be taken into view are great age and such impaired mentality and broken health as permanently disqualify him for episcopal service. These are the only things which determine superannuation.

In deciding whether a bishop should be superannuated, it is more than a question as to whether a bishop, who was elected by a two-thirds vote of a General Conference, can be superannuated by a mere majority vote.

In determining the question of superannuation, the proper and only fair way is to act on one case at a time and to decide it separately, and on its own merits.

To wholesale all the bishops, young and old, sick and well, strong and weak, and vote at once on all of them, as to whether any should be superannuated, is as absurd and improper as to take the complete roll of an Annual Conference and vote on all the members at once in order to determine those who should be placed on the superannuate list. The time immemorial way is to vote on an individual case presented separately, and this is part of the common law of the denomination.

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As in the Annual Conference, so in the General Conference, the question should be raised on one man at a time, and the only question should be, Has the bishop, by great years, failure of mental faculties, or hopelessly broken health, ceased to be effective in the episcopacy and become incapable of discharging his duties? and the question should be voted on as in the case of any other motion, and as is the established usage and law in an Annual Conference.

Any other way opens an opportunity for abuse and injustice through votes cast, not on the real question of superannuation because of a superannuated condition, but through prejudice or revenge. Such voting might place even a young bishop on the superannuated list, though the very word superannuate implies that a man is very aged or beyond the years when proper service is possible.

Such voting would tend to destroy the impartiality and independence of the bishops, and so impair the efficiency of the episcopacy, for the bishop would perceive that, under cover of such a vote on superannuation, men might be tempted to punish a bishop because he did not yield to their dictation and, perhaps, go against his own conscience. The dread of such an ordeal might tend to *make some* bishops timid or time-serving, which would be disastrous to the Church. Besides, it would not be just.

CHAPTER XVII  
EPISCOPAL RESIDENCES





## CHAPTER XVII

### EPISCOPAL RESIDENCES

EPISCOPAL residences, in the modern acceptation of the words, were unknown in the early period of the Church. At the beginning, and for generations thereafter, the bishop selected his own place of residence.

This was regarded as the right of the episcopacy, and no one dreamed of dictating where the bishop should have a home for his family. It was deemed sufficient if the bishop did the episcopal work for which he was elected. He was an itinerant general superintendent, and he itinerated generally in the discharge of his episcopal duty, while his family resided wherever he desired. So there was no technical or official residence under the original and long-continued plan.

This was the usage and understanding down to 1808, when the written Constitution was made and adopted by the General Conference of that year, and it was understood that this freedom of residence was included in "the plan of our general superintendency."

This perhaps may be regarded as an academic rather than a practical question, but it is interesting to note that down to this time the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church have individu-

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ally chosen the residence for their families according to their own judgment, while each bishop obeyed the law to "travel through the connection at large" and discharged his duty as an itinerant general superintendent, as did the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church before 1808 and for generations subsequent to that date. Indeed, in the Methodist Episcopal Church there was no designation of "episcopal residences" until very recent years, the stress having been put on the bishop, and not on the family, as though the latter did not belong to the episcopacy, as the bishop did.

The fixing of episcopal residences in any sense, suggestive or positive, is very modern. Down to 1872 every bishop had his family residence wherever his convenience, pleasure, or judgment indicated. Then began a change.

In the General Conference of 1872, having elected the unprecedented number of eight bishops, the following was adopted:

"The Committee on Episcopacy respectfully report that in their judgment one of the newly-elected Bishops should reside at or near each of the following places: San Francisco, Saint Louis, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Council Bluffs or Omaha, St. Paul; and that they should select their residences from the places named according to their seniority in official position." (General Conference Journal, 1872, p. 321.)

Several things are to be noticed in this action: First, it does not refer to the older bishops; sec-

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ond, it is not mandatory, but is the expression of a judgment that the new bishops "should" do so and so; third, that no particular bishop was suggested for any particular place, but that the new bishops should determine for themselves in order of official seniority.

A later action was proposed at that General Conference, on the third day of June, that should a necessity arise which the Board of Bishops shall regard as sufficient to require the change of a Bishop from one place to another named, such change may be made by order of the Board of Bishops, provided that not more than one Bishop shall reside at any place named." (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1872, pp. 403, 404.) However, this was laid on the table. Possibly the rush of business at the close of the session had something to do with this disposition of the matter.

Even the action of 1872 was not an assertion of authority by the General Conference as to where bishops or their families should live, but rather a suggestion or expression of judgment, which, while it might have influence, was not a command. It was not that they shall or must reside, but they "should reside at or near each of the following places," and, indeed, it contained an acknowledgment that the right of selection belonged to the bishops, for it said, "they should select their residences," etc.

That the General Conference thus began in 1872 to say anything in regard to domicile of bishops was not because any new, specific au-

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thority of a constitutional character had been given the General Conference to fix or even indicate a bishop's residence, for the power of the General Conference had not been changed in any particular in this regard. Further, the action did not propose to fix the residence of any particular bishop or to affect the residences of any of the older bishops, but to suggest places appropriate for bishops to live, and to express the judgment that the newly-elected bishops should choose "according to their seniority" by election out of the proposed list of places.

But from that time, and for six quadrenniums thereafter, the bishops chose their residences from the list of places indicated by the General Conferences. Indeed, from 1872 to 1900, a period of twenty-eight years, that was the way the episcopal residences were determined.

In the General Conference of 1900 the Committee on Episcopacy reported and the General Conference adopted the following:

"Upon the proposition referred to the Committee on the Episcopacy to change the method recently in use among us of assigning the Bishops to their residences, so that the General Conference shall station the Bishops at the places which it designates as episcopal residences, the Committee begs leave to report as follows: The power to determine where the General Superintendents shall reside inheres in the General Conference. In the exercise of that power it has from time to time prescribed a method in which the location

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of the Bishops respectively should be designated. In the judgment of the Committee, the time has come when the General Conference should directly decide where each individual Bishop should reside. We, therefore, recommend that the General Conference shall assign each Bishop to his residence for the ensuing four years, and that the Committee on the Episcopacy shall make the assignment of Bishops to their residences, subject to the approval of the General Conference." (General Conference Journal, 1900, pp. 424, 425.)

This was a growth from the suggestion of 1872, and illustrates how modifications can be made, though in the long preceding years the law and the established usage was all the other way. The suggestion has developed into the positive determination, and from that time the bishops have had their official residences decided by the General Conferences. To bring the General Conference to this point took one hundred and sixteen years.

The same General Conference of 1900 began to place episcopal residences for bishops who were general superintendents in foreign lands. This had never been done before. In 1900 the General Conference indicated an episcopal residence for a General Superintendent in Europe and another in China; by the General Conference of 1904, one was added for South America, and in 1908 a second residence of the same character was placed in China.

The constitutionality of putting episcopal resi-

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dences of bishops who were general superintendents in foreign lands was challenged, and the action was prevented down to 1900, but the question of unconstitutionality continues to be raised.

However, the placing of an official residence of a general superintendent in a foreign land does not limit him or restrict his administration to that foreign land. He is still a general superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, with rights and privileges in the United States equal to those general superintendents who have residences in the United States. He can return to the United States, even if his residence is abroad, and preside over Conferences and attend all meetings which the office of bishop entitles a general superintendent to attend in the homeland. Residence carries with it no episcopal limitation and gives no administrative power, and can not in our system under our Constitution. A general superintendent is a general superintendent, and, by the Constitution, he is an itinerant general superintendent and can not be limited even by the General Conference. An episcopal residence in a foreign land does not limit the bishop to that country, any more than a residence in any particular place in the United States limits the bishop to the vicinity of that place.

A residence does not, and never was understood to, confine the bishop to that particular point or its precincts. The very nature of the bishopric as a general itinerancy for purposes of

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general superintendency would prevent that and does prohibit it. A bishop can not be here and there, and there and elsewhere, at the same time, and the itinerant system calls for movement.

In these latter days, some who know little about the nature and history of our fundamental law seem to think that a bishop should be so resident that he would always be at the residence and ready to respond personally to every call. One, however, might as well expect a presiding elder or district superintendent always to be at his home and never anywhere else. That would destroy the intention and efficiency of the presiding eldership, and a similar restriction on a bishop would so reduce him that the bishop would hardly be as big as a big presiding elder.

It is manifestly impossible for a bishop to be at all times in his residence. If he is faithful to his trust as an itinerant general superintendent for the whole Church he must sometimes or frequently be away. Many duties necessarily call him to remote points. If he stayed all the time or the most of his time at his residence, what would become of the general field? If he remained all the time or most of the time at his official residence, the Church at large would have very inadequate itinerant general superintendence.

No one who understands the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church can imagine that the designation of an episcopal residence means that the bishop must stay there all the time or most of



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the time. The Constitution makes no bishop permanently resident for any amount of time, whether it be great or small, but it does make him an itinerant general superintendent "to travel through the connection at large and to oversee the work generally.

Every one must see, therefore, that it is a point to which he may come and from which he may go. He is not to stay so as to interfere with his itinerant general superintendency, but he is to go where he is needed and when he is needed.

In the very nature of things, therefore, the bishop must have liberty to determine his movements, how long he shall stay in one place, and when he should go elsewhere in the discharge of his duty and the performance of the work of the general superintendency. That has always belonged to the episcopacy and that is part of the episcopal "plan" which is imbedded in the Constitution. The point is not how much time a bishop stays in one place, but how he attends to his work as a general superintendent. Indeed, it is possible for a bishop to be necessarily so itinerant as to give him little time to be in any kind of residence, and very little time to see his own family.

An assignment to an official residence does not mean that a bishop must stay in a deadly climate, and especially in the most deadly season. Neither does it mean that the bishop must unnecessarily sacrifice his family in an unhealthful climate.



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Common sense, humanity, and other valid considerations must be taken into account, and the Church is not to be less considerate than business firms or other secular organizations. Conditions must be taken into consideration.

The bishop was an itinerant general superintendent before a residence was indicated, and after the residence has been designated he remains an itinerant general superintendent. As such the emphasis is always on the general rather than the local service, and on the itinerant rather than the settled feature. That is the Constitution, and even the General Conference has no authority to change that, and it is to be assumed that it has no desire or intention to do so. Always the chief point is, does the bishop attend to his duties as an itinerant general superintendent? Nevertheless, a bishop will as far as possible conform to the wish of the General Conference and care for the interests of the place indicated as an official residence.

Even if the bishop has to be absent from his official residence, his interest may be specially manifested there, and, though at a distance, he can project work and carry out plans for the benefit of the Church at and in the vicinity of his official residence, but the real question is not how much physical residing, but how much actual supervision there may have been there and elsewhere.

One error that some seem to be in danger of embracing is the notion that the bishop resident

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at a particular place has special power vested in him by the fact of his residence. This, however, is a doctrine which the Church has never conceded and which the Constitution has never sustained. Under the law residence carries with it no special authority, and no authority whatever. Residence may give an opportunity for the exertion of influence, but it gives no authority. Power has never been placed in a residence and has never legally attached to it.

It is a still greater error to suppose that a bishop, because of his residence, not only has special authority where he resides, but also has special authority along lines radiating from the residence and that to a distance of hundreds of miles.

A residence, however, is only a point and carries with it no radiating authority. Even if power was fixed in the point termed a residence, it would not follow that the bishop would have special authority at any distance from that point. Residence in one city would not mean residence a hundred or fifty or ten miles from that city, and would not mean radiating authority any number of miles from that particular point.

If there was such radiating power, there would be no way of determining how far that radiating authority should or could extend. One bishop might seek to exert his power a short distance, while another might claim that it extended indefinitely and infinitely.

If this notion were to prevail, then the Church

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would have metropolitan bishops and country bishops, and the bishop in the biggest city might claim precedence and try to exert authority over the bishops in the smaller places, even if they were not smaller bishops. Then history might gradually repeat itself.

Further, if there were such radiating authority thus making a sphere of influence which could be defined, it would be equivalent to districting the "itinerant general superintendency," which would be a contradiction of terms and which would be unconstitutional. It would be creating a diocese or district, which would be a violation of the Constitution, for it would interfere with and tend to destroy "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

The fact is that the episcopal authority in a given locality vests, not in the residence or the resident, but in the presiding bishop of the Annual Conference covering the locality, and the resident bishop has no authority over the appointments, unless he is at the same time the presiding bishop, and then he does not have it as resident but as the duly appointed president.

Further, the resident does not come into that authority when the Annual Conference adjourns, for the presiding bishop remains the active president from the time the Conference is assigned him until at the end of the year the assignment is changed in the legal manner, and the law is that the administration of the Conference remains with the presiding bishop who made the appointments,

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or, as the rule reads: "The Bishop who makes the appointments must have the right to superintend the work." So there is no time during the year for the resident bishop, as resident, to exert administrative authority. In other words, the administrative power pertains to the presiding and not to the resident bishop, and remains with the presiding bishop, who makes the appointments.

If the resident bishop could interfere with the work of the presiding bishop, before the Conference, during the Conference, or after the Conference, there would be uncertainty, confusion, and inconsistency in administration.

With such an arrangement the presiding bishop would not have a free hand in his administration and the next day the resident might overturn the work of the president who held the Conference.

Thus, a minister might receive an appointment from the president, and the next day the resident might send him to another place. So a Church might think it had a certain man as its pastor, when the next day the resident could take the preacher away and send another in his place.

It may be said "he would not do that," but that is an uncertain assumption. Under such an arrangement he would have the power and might use it.

Even to voluntarily turn a Conference over to the resident would be open to all these objections.

If the resident could make the appointments as well as the president bishop, he could prevent

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appointments the presiding bishop was convinced should be made, and he could at any time overturn appointments the presiding bishop had made, and there would be no certainty or consistency in the episcopal administration. There would be ecclesiastical chaos.

Such authority in a resident is unknown to the law and practice of the bishops, is not provided for in the law of the Church, was not and is not in "the plan," and, therefore, to recognize such a theory would be giving undesirable and unconstitutional power to the resident and the residence.

To give a resident bishop such power in his residential section would be an infringement of the Constitution for it would create a local episcopacy, whereas the Constitution permits only an itinerant general episcopate.

It would also tend to create conflicts between the president bishop and the resident bishop; in other words, between the bishop in charge and the bishop not in charge.

To endow a resident or his residence with such power would be a violation of the Constitution of the Church which could not be made either by the General Conference or by the Board of Bishops, but if attempted by anybody would result in innumerable disasters.

Without any assertion or recognition of such unconstitutional power, it is, however, possible for the bishop who resides in the locality to render valuable assistance to the bishop in charge by

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giving him facts and suggestions, and such aid would be gladly received and considered by the presiding bishop, but the responsibility belongs to the president, and he is and must be left free to conduct his own administration. Frequently, indeed, it is conducive to the comfort of the resident that he shall not administer or be supposed to administer in the Conference within whose territory he lives, but that a bishop who lives elsewhere shall bear the burden and endure the criticism.

Leaving out of the question matters of authority and administration, there are many good things a bishop may do in the vicinity where he lives. A resident bishop, like any other bishop, may exert a personal influence as a bishop that will extend as far as his personality can project itself. Too much, however, should not be expected, for no bishop can do what some imagine every bishop should do.

Neither the resident nor the president has the power to compel things that some think he possesses. In regard to various local movements, a bishop has no authority to compel obedience to his wish or judgment. Frequently he can merely advise, and at most is merely a voice and an influence, and, under the law, can be nothing more, and this is true of both the resident and the president bishop.

Some might say that sometimes the bishop who presides is at a distance, but it also may be that the bishop who resides is far away. One who

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in this sense notes the absence of the presiding bishop has a very shortsighted view of the polity of the Church in this particular.

According to our system the bishop in charge of a Conference is constructively present in his Conference territory, though he may be physically absent. Indeed, with the postal and telegraphic facilities that now exist, he is accessible in a short time anywhere in the United States of America and even in the world.

Continuous physical presence is an impossibility in the case of the presiding bishop or of the so-called resident bishop. For any kind of a bishop it is impossible under "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency." The genius of our system is not for the bishop to stay in one place, but to come and go, and "to travel through the connection at large." (Discipline, 1908, ¶196, §6.) It is not of our system that the bishop shall remain permanently for social or similar purposes, or for any purpose but that he shall travel at large and do the work of a general overseer here and there throughout the Church. The aim of the Constitution is not a resident episcopacy, but an itinerant superintendency for the Church generally.

But no matter where the presiding bishop may be, the local field is never left without intelligent personal supervision. The bishop is there, not only constructively, but he is there representatively, and every inch of ground is directly under the eye of the bishop's resident representative.



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The bishop's local representative for the continuous local work, and especially in emergencies, is the presiding elder or district superintendent, and usually there are several of these officers who can confer and bring their united wisdom to bear.

If there is an emergency, the presiding elder or district superintendent meets it temporarily, and immediately reports to the presiding bishop for advice or for a permanent arrangement, while at the same time he carries on the local administration, whether the bishop is on the spot or a thousand miles away. The true resident in this Church with a traveling episcopacy is the presiding elder or district superintendent.

Perhaps there are dangers lurking in the disposition manifested by a few persons to put too much stress on the words "resident bishop," which is a title unknown to the law of the Church.



CHAPTER XVIII  
A NON-LOCALIZED EPISCOPACY



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A NON-LOCALIZED EPISCOPACY

A LOCALIZED episcopacy has never been a matter of law or usage in the Methodist Episcopal Church. On the contrary, the facts have all been opposed to it, and, from the beginning, the bishops have not been restricted to a designated section of the Church, but have had the whole field and have itinerated here and there throughout the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

Further, it has been understood that under the organic law of the Church itinerant general superintendency was absolutely required and could not be interfered with. A localized bishopric is not of our system and never has been in our practice, and our constitutional method of episcopal supervision is a non-localized episcopacy, with a free circulation of the bishops throughout the United States.

Now and then efforts have been made to localize the bishops by giving a bishop a defined territory, which would be a subdivision of the field in the United States of America, but the Church has never accepted the idea, which was generally regarded as a revolutionary proposition.

The idea is far from being a new one. It has

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been advanced at various times, and in other days has been scanned, discussed, and rejected. Indeed, as far back as 1808, just prior to the adoption of the Constitution of the Church, a strenuous effort was made to incorporate the principle of localization with a bishop for each Annual Conference. This was proposed in the General Conference of that year, but was decisively defeated, and then the General Conference proceeded to adopt a Constitution which forbade a localized episcopacy.

A knowledge of history sometimes seems to perish as the generations go and come, and individuals make suggestions as though they were new, not knowing that these very notions had been presented and suggested long years before.

And even now some would, if they could, radically change the organic principles of the Church and restrict the bishop to a defined and circumscribed section of the territory of the Church in the United States. The proposition advanced by some is to establish a localized episcopacy, each bishop having a diocese, or something similar thereto, in a limited area. Usually, however, they desire to avoid the use of the word "diocese" or the term "diocesan episcopacy," and prefer to use the phrase a "districted episcopacy," though they do not always make a clear distinction between the terms; but, whatever term may be employed, the purpose of the proposition is to destroy the kind of episcopacy the Church has had from the beginning, and to transform

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the itinerant general episcopate into a local and restricted bishopric, so that instead of the bishop being a bishop for the whole Church all the time, and moving through the Church generally, he will for a period of time, or, possibly, all his time, be assigned to a particular section of the territory and actually or practically be limited thereto.

That something may be said for such an arrangement may be conceded, for there never has been any kind of a proposition that something could not be said in its favor, and, as to this proposal, one might think, at first sight, very much might be said in its support.

There is, however, another side to the question, and it should be asked whether supposed advantages are not overbalanced by positive and serious disadvantages; and, second, whether such a radical and revolutionary change can be advantageously and legally worked into our episcopal system.

A candid study of the questions will show that the localization of bishops in the Methodist Episcopal Church would be opposed to and destructive of its long-tested and time-honored episcopacy.

If the law and the genius of the system would permit such a radical change, it would not be practicable.

It would have too many complications and would create too many new difficulties. In short, it would be practically unworkable and would not do what its proposers desire and expect.

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Among the practical difficulties which should be plainly perceived, the following should be named:

To meet such a scheme of division and local assignment, the territory for each bishop should be comparatively small in order to enable him to perform the kind of local work which is contemplated.

This would necessitate the election of possibly one hundred and fifty to two hundred bishops, to cover the ground over which twenty bishops can now do real episcopal work under the present law.

This would mean, say, ten times the present expense for episcopal service, and yet the Church would, probably, get no more, or little more, genuine episcopal work, for various forms of activity proposed are not really episcopal, but could be performed quite as well by pastors and presiding elders, or others, and the effect would be to reduce the bishop to the proportions of a big presiding elder. The proposition to localize the bishops, even if practicable, is not desirable.

It would mean that the same bishop would preside in the same district for a quadrennium or longer. Each bishop would be placed in and fenced in his own little corner. That would mean that the Church anywhere and everywhere would practically know only one bishop, whereas the Church now is interested in all the bishops, feels that all belong to the whole Church, and are possible anywhere and everywhere. Any Annual

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Conference feels that any one of the Board of Bishops may be its presiding bishop in a coming Conference year, and so realize that every bishop is its bishop. Under the proposed scheme for the localization of each bishop, each district might know its one bishop, but the tendency would be to lose interest in all the other bishops, and for all the other bishops to lose interest in the isolated and insulated section over which they did not preside.

The Church likes to see all the bishops and the preachers like the idea of having a new bishop. Now each bishop is a presiding bishop *in posse*, and in the course of years each Annual Conference may have every bishop in its presidency, which would not be the case where one bishop was assigned for a quadrennium or a greater number of years. The Church likes a rotation in the presidency of the Conferences, and the preachers like a change of bishops.

Rotation has advantages. For example, the preacher feels that the new bishop may appreciate him more than the former one and give him more substantial recognition, but where the same bishop presides for a quadrennium, the preacher may imagine that he has been misunderstood and misrepresented, and that the bishop has been prejudiced against him. The coming of a new bishop gives such a preacher new encouragement and new hope, so the laity may have a corresponding feeling.

Furthermore, it may be feared or felt that

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the resident bishop in charge for four years or more may come under the influence of a small coterie living within the district and that the bishop may be tempted to yield to local influences that he may live more amicably or comfortably with these influential persons, and that in the matter of pastoral assignments he might be tempted to ask how the appointment would affect his individual interest.

It would seem that it is easier for an itinerant general superintendent, who comes and goes, to be more impartial and independent in making the appointment of preachers because he is less likely to feel coercive pressure of local considerations of a personal character.

Such a localization of the episcopacy would be a disappointment to its promoters, for in the Methodist Episcopal Church a local bishop could never do what is expected. He has little power to command, except in the matter of appointments, and appointments can be made by a non-located or non-resident bishop. Ordinarily in the very matters hoped for he can only be an influence, and any bishop may exert influence. Then, if the local bishop did undertake to exert a very aggressive leadership, probably some would call it an attempted dictatorship, and resent it in a most vigorous fashion, perhaps informing the bishop that it was their affair.

What the Church gains by an itinerant general superintendency would be lost under a local-



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ized episcopacy, and the loss would affect the Church in many directions. For example, such an arrangement would diminish the broad general knowledge now possessed by the bishops, and possessed by them because they are in a general superintendency which compels them to travel far and wide "through the connection at large." In this way the bishops obtain general and detailed information that is of incalculable value in the councils of the Church, and the view of one bishop is supplemented or qualified by the view of another who also knows the locality and its conditions.

A localized episcopacy would tend to a localized Church in the restricted section or district. The connectional bond would be weakened or broken, and local or provincial peculiarities would become stronger than the life of the general Church. In addition the locality might take on the peculiarities of the localized bishop, so that there might be as many different types of Methodist Episcopalianism as there were local bishops in the several sections. All this would endanger, if not absolutely destroy, the genius and unity of the denomination. It would tend to develop sectional types, produce differences between the sections in the councils of the Church, and the practical separation and isolation would tend to denominational disintegration and end in sectional Churches of different types. In other words, a localized episcopacy would tend to local

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types of Churches and to the destruction of the unity which has always characterized the Methodist Episcopal Church.

On the contrary, the general superintendency with the bishops traveling here and there over the whole Church and with frequent changes of episcopal administration tends to preserve the homogeneity of the entire Church. Destroy that and the conventional bond would be weakened or broken, and the local peculiarities or developments might become stronger than the spirit of the general Church.

If there was a localized episcopacy, then it might be necessary, in order to try to preserve the unity of the whole Church, to establish an over-episcopate, or arch-bishopric. Then, to bind the archbishops together, there might be found necessity to create a higher officer who would be a central authority or ecclesiastical head center who might be given some historic title or for whom some new appellation might be invented. Indeed, that very idea has been suggested by one who favors local bishops, and he proposes many local bishops with a few general superintendents over them.

Then, with residential permanence for a quadrennium or longer, there would naturally grow up metropolitan bishops in the great centers who would stand out more conspicuously than the bishops in smaller places and they would be regarded as minor bishops, and so the men the law

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elects as equals would find by the circumstance of residence, accidental or otherwise, that they had practically become inferior or subordinate, while the bishop who happened to be in the political or commercial center would practically have an imperial see whose elevations would permit the incumbent to look down upon his brethren in less favored places. Thus the parity of the bishops would be destroyed, whereas under the itinerant general superintendency there is an equality in the episcopacy, each bishop being the equal of any other bishop officially, and each having the possibility of presiding in the greatest city and in the largest Conference; but even if some valid reasons might possibly be presented in favor of a localized episcopate, there are constitutional obstacles that make it impossible for the General Conference to establish such a limited episcopacy.

Even if it were desirable, which it is not, the General Conference has not the power to transform the "itinerant general superintendency" into a localized episcopacy, for the Constitution of the Church declares:

"The General Conference shall not change or alter any part of our government so as to do away episcopacy, nor destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency." (Book of Discipline, 1908, Par. 46, S. 3.) So the General Conference can not destroy, change, modify, neutralize, disuse "the plan of the itinerant general superintendency" that existed in 1808, when that provision

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of the Constitution was adopted, and can not defeat in any way the same plan that exists at the present time.

Because "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency" is a part of the Constitution and there is a specific constitutional restriction upon the General Conference in this very matter, the General Conference has no power to make such a change.

The General Conference of 1888 passed a resolution which looked in the direction of a modification of the working of the general superintendency, but later, after Bishop Merrill asked some questions as to the meaning of the intended operation of the resolution, revealing various practical difficulties, the General Conference, in view of this revelation, promptly reversed the action.

The question of the constitutionality of the proposition to localize or district bishops was tested in the General Conference of 1904.

The following resolution was offered and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

*"Resolved*, that the Committee consider (1) the question of assigning General Superintendents to particular sections or districts for periods of four years, with the possibility of continuing said General Superintendents in said districts for a longer period, and (2) to report as to the constitutionality and practicability of such a plan, and (3) if practicable and constitutional, to present a plan for such districting of the General

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Superintendents.” (Gen. Conf. Jour., 1904, page 233.)

The Judiciary Committee carefully considered the question and reported that, under the Constitution, bishops could not be assigned to districts for a quadrennium with the possibility of their continuance in a district beyond the quadrennium, or after the quadrennium, and further, that bishops could not be assigned at all. In other words, the General Conference had no power to localize a bishop or assign, or have him assigned, for a term to any particular locality.

In the report, the Judiciary Committee, among other things, said:

“The obligation of general itinerancy under our plan attaches to the office of Bishop;” “The obligation was inherent in our plan of episcopacy; in which event, so long as this plan is preserved, general itinerancy is a duty of the Bishop;” and, specifically referring to the lack of power in the General Conference, the Committee said: “This body is invested with no more power to trench upon the protection which the Constitution affords to this plan for four years than for forty.”

Further it said: “Such a regulation would necessarily operate to ‘Destroy’ the ‘plan of our itinerant general superintendency,’ whether the limit be for four years or for a longer period.” Hence it concluded: “This body is debarred” from “assigning General Superintendents to par-

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ticular sections or districts for periods of four years,' ' etc. (Gen. Conf. Journal, 1904, p. 514.)

This was adopted by the General Conference and stands as its official ruling, as it has been the judgment of all the General Conferences from the time the Constitution was made in 1808, but above the ruling stands the distinct declaration in the Constitution of the Church, and no General Conference can reverse the Constitution.

To know what the episcopacy was and is that the General Conference can not touch, we must put ourselves back to 1808, and see what it was then.

The Constitution itself gives us the outline that the facts of that time fill up. It was a general episcopacy, and an itinerant general episcopacy, and such an episcopacy according to a well understood plan, and the General Conference was prohibited from changing or interfering with this "plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

The bishops then were not localized or districted, but exercised a general superintendency over the whole Church, so that a bishop might be anywhere or everywhere. Instead of being a settled bishop in one section, he itinerated from section to section and here and there through the Church generally. This was and is the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the General Conference can not transform "the itinerant general superintendency" into a localized episcopacy.

If the General Conference can not localize the

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bishops, can the Board of Bishops localize themselves?

If the Church was so anxious to preserve "the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency" that by constitutional limitation it put "the plan," as it was down to 1808, beyond the control of the General Conference, it is inconceivable that it was intended or possible for the bishops themselves to defeat the Constitution, or make the Constitutional protection null and void.

If the General Conference, representing the whole Church, can not directly or indirectly destroy "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," neither can the Board of Bishops which exists under and for the plan. The Constitution gives them no such power.

If this localization of the Bishops interferes with, modifies, changes, or destroys "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," as it was in 1808, then neither the General Conference nor the Board of Bishops can authorize it. If the Constitution prohibits the General Conference from destroying the "Plan," it does not authorize the bishops to destroy it. The intention of the Constitution is that "the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency" shall go on unchanged.

If the idea that some seem to entertain about limiting the area over which a bishop might go were carried out, it certainly would not be "our itinerant general superintendency" in harmony with "the Plan," as it was understood in and before 1808, as protected by the Constitution of



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the Church. That would be destructive of the "Plan" and a violation of the Constitution.

If it destroys or limits the general superintendency so as to prevent the fullest conformity to the "Plan" of the General Superintendency with its itinerant and general character, then there is no power in the Church that can thus localize the bishops as long as the Constitution of the Church remains as it is.

The question is: Would such a localization interfere with "the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency?"

The General Conference of 1904 had the subject before it and it is said, in the report of the Committee of the Judiciary which it adopted, that such an arrangement could not be made constitutionally.

While the bishops have no more power than the General Conference to destroy or change "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," it is possible for the bishops to assign one of their number to the presidency of the same Annual Conference for a second year, but the assignment must be made separately for good and sufficient reasons that appear at each assignment, but, as they can not in any way infringe on the Constitutional restriction, they can not repeat an assignment of the same bishop in any manner that directly or indirectly or practically means the making of a fixed, or practically fixed, territorial district for a bishop, or definite districts for any number of bishops, for the bishops have no right to violate



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the Constitution of the Church by localizing the bishops in any sense or any degree and so destroying "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

At the bottom of the matter, in the mind of some who have favored a localized episcopacy, is a misconception as to the nature of a bishop's work. They seem to expect that the local bishop would do many things that are not really episcopal duties at all.

According to the law, it is not the function of the bishop to do certain things that they would thrust upon him. He can do them, and under certain circumstances may do them; that is to say, he has ability to do them; but most, or all, of these things belong to the pastors and the district superintendents.

Strictly speaking, local work of that character is not the duty of the bishop at all. As a bishop, it is not his province to do the work of a pastor in the local Church, or to do the work of a presiding elder or district superintendent on a district.

The function of the bishop is not that of local, but of general supervision. He is a general superintendent, and, as such, it is his duty "to oversee the spiritual and temporal business of our Church," and specifically to oversee through the district superintendents, somewhat as the manager of a great commercial house manages through his heads of departments, or, as the President of the United States carries on the affairs of the Gov-

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ernment through the several members of his Cabinet.

The bishop is a general supervisor giving specific instructions, or making particular decisions, as conditions and circumstances seem to require.

Even if a bishop could have a particular district, it would be necessary for him to be absent very frequently from his residence, so, probably, even then there still would be complaint that the resident bishop was too non-resident, and there would be agitation to compel him to stay at home.

Suppose there was such a sort of resident bishop, how much of the physical presence of the resident would the little and remote places in the territory get, if the bishop gave to the center what some have proposed, and, if the remote place got his presence, how could he meet the demand where his supposed abode might happen to be? If he was away a great deal, what special gain would there be at the residence? If he was not away a great deal, what special gain would there be in the little and remote places?

The fact is, the system does not meditate such a residence or such a localization. The system does not intend that he shall stay at home, or travel within narrow limits, but that he shall travel "at large" and "through the connection," as the law reads, and supervise the work generally, and he may be doing the best possible work when he is traveling and supervising "at large."

Then, because of human weakness and perversity, there is the risk that, if the bishop was

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localized for even a few years, there might be a growing demand that he itinerate from that place.

But some one may say, how can the new bishop that comes to the Conference know about the field and perform the work?

Such an inquirer might just as well say that a new general could not take command of an army in the field, but it is done, and the commander can at once summon his general officers and obtain the requisite information on which to base his action. So the bishop finds local officers who possess the local knowledge, and the district superintendents can impart to him the necessary information.

The bishop has six months to study his Conference before the session, and, in view of the facts presented, the bishop can know and intelligently decide, and he has six months after the Conference to follow up his work at Conference.

Then, there are fairly well-settled principles of administration that apply everywhere, and there are general principles that apply in the adjustment of appointments in any particular place.

A judge enters a court and hears a case about which previously he had known nothing, but he hears the witnesses and the counsel on both sides, and with his knowledge of law he is able to make a correct decision. So a bishop can hear the representations from district superintendents, preachers, and people, and, weighing all the statements, can justly decide, and quite as well as the judge who has just taken his place on the bench.

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With fixed bishops there would be greater difficulties.

As the system has been and now is, there always is direct supervision. No Annual Conference is left without episcopal supervision. If a bishop goes out of the country, another bishop immediately takes his place as the presiding bishop. When a bishop is taken ill, another bishop promptly takes his work. When a bishop dies, another is instantly substituted. If the resident bishop of Boston is away attending to his episcopal duties, if there is no resident in New York, and if the residents of Philadelphia and Washington are abroad, another bishop can be in that territory ready for any emergency, or, if he can not be present physically, he communicates with and directs through the presiding elders or district superintendents. So when a presiding bishop can not reach his Conference, another bishop is summoned by mail, messenger, or telegraph, and promptly takes charge.

Surely it is a wonderful system!

With a moveable and flexible episcopacy every field is covered and each need is met with a non-localized or general episcopacy.

CHAPTER XIX  
THE LOCAL SUPERVISION



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LOCAL SUPERVISION

SOME who have suggested the localizing of bishops seem to have thought the Church has no provision for local supervision. Indeed, the very proposition itself to localize the bishops overlooks the fact that the system already provides for local supervision of a most effective kind, and, ever since the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Church has never been without such a provision.

The permanent local supervision is provided for through a class of officers called presiding elders,\* or district superintendents, and by the presiding eldership, or district superintendency, every foot of the territory and every preacher and Church are locally supervised.

This local supervision is closely related to the episcopacy, and is regarded as belonging to the episcopal system, and, so much so, that the appointment of the presiding elder or district superintendent is constitutionally as much the work of the bishop as the appointment of any preacher.

These local supervisors are the agents or representatives of the bishop in charge of the par-

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\*For more than a century, and practically from the beginning, Presiding Elder has been the honored and expressive clerical title of the officer charged with local supervision under the bishop. He was always called an Elder. In 1908, the title District Superintendent began to be used.

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ticular Conference, its territory, and those included therein, and through these local officers there is constant episcopal supervision, even if the bishop is not physically present.

The bishops are the over-seers while the presiding elders or district superintendents are the under-seers, as related to the bishops, and, at the same time, the overseers of those under them.

This system of local supervision is admirably adapted to its purpose. Each of these local supervisors has a limited and compact territory which he is to cultivate. In it he has a comparatively small number of Churches and a small body of ministers, and he is expected to visit each charge officially four times a year, at intervals of three months, so he is constantly in close contact or communication with both preachers and people. All the year and in successive years he studies the pastors and the Churches. He is in position to propose new projects and to aid the pastors and their charges in their new or old enterprises. He is resident within his small district and so may always be easily reached by those over whom he has charge, while, at the same time, he can keep in communication with the presiding bishop of the Conference, and when the proper time comes he is prepared, because of his local knowledge, to give information to the bishop in regard to pastoral adjustments. Furthermore, he is backed by the authority of the bishop, and, when necessary, is directed by him. In view of these and other facts, it would be hard to conceive of a more thor-



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ough arrangement for both over and under sight, and both general and local supervision.

Yet a few may say this is not sufficient. But why not? Well, it may be answered, they are not bishops. But why should they be bishops in rank? What episcopal act do they need to perform? When an episcopal act is required, a bishop can be found for that purpose. During the year, ordinarily no episcopal function is necessary, and when the Annual Conference convenes a bishop will be there. For this local supervision a limited or local bishop is not needed, and the superintendent of the small section does not need to be a bishop or have the technical rank of a bishop.

The local officer may be exceedingly efficient in his kind of supervision. But some may object that presiding elder or district superintendent is "not big enough." If so, then that does not prove the system to be faulty, but simply that the incumbent of the office is incompetent. Then, if the man is not competent, the remedy is, not to destroy the system, but to get the right man for the place.

There have been and are competent men. Mighty men have been presiding elders. There have been men in this office who have had the ability of bishops. Some of them have become bishops, and made better bishops because of their experience and training in the presiding eldership.

Let us suppose that the district superintendent or presiding elder is a man of equal ability to a bishop, then he could perceive and compre-

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hend the situation as well as the bishop. If he was called a bishop he would not be any abler and he could not do this local work any better, even if he is not called a bishop, nevertheless he is the same man he would be if he was a bishop, the equal of men in the episcopacy, or who may be in the bishopric, with the same knowledge and the same ability, and if so, as competent to do the work of limited local supervision as though he bore the title of a bishop. Suppose the localization of bishops could be made legally, what would be the advantage?

Does any one think it is possible for a resident bishop in a vast territory for a single quadrennium, who then moves to another territory, to know more about that region and its people than, or as much as, a district superintendent or presiding elder, who has a period of six years, and who possibly has lived all his life in the very section over which he travels?

But, says one, the bishop must not be moved at the end of four years. Then, by permanence of residence and administration, you would destroy the "itinerant general superintendency," which would be unconstitutional.

The demand of some for a modified diocesan episcopacy is really a reflection on the presiding eldership, and is equivalent to an assertion that the incumbents of that office have not been efficient.

Logically, even if this were true, it would not be an argument against the office, though it would be a reason for selecting better men. Under the

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system the man is moveable, and, if the men are not doing the work properly, then they should be replaced with better men, and let this most valuable system be preserved and have a fair chance.

But there have been great presiding elders, and such men are in office to-day. It would take a very long chapter to recount what the presiding eldership has been in and has done for the denomination. It is not possible to overestimate the value of the office and the average officer. The presiding elders in late years, as well as in the earlier times, have done a wonderful work. To verify this we have but to think of the thousands of Churches erected through the co-operation of presiding elders and pastors, and frequently on the initiative of the presiding elder.

To some it may look like a little thing for a presiding elder to visit a charge once a quarter, but it has an effect similar to that of the visit of an inspecting officer in the army. When the inspection is expected the soldier burnishes his arms and puts everything in order, and so when the Quarterly Conference approaches and the district superintendent comes around, both preacher and people are impelled to make the best showing possible, or at least a better showing than otherwise would be the case.

There is a degree of stimulation from the visit of the presiding elder, even if he does not preach four times a year in each Church, for, after all, his function is not so much that of preaching as of supervising and superintending. If, in addi-

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tion, there can be the great sermon, then all the better.

So, to some, it may look like a trifling matter for the district superintendent to ask in the Quarterly Conference the stated list of questions, but these questions call out the condition of the charge and the answers form a quarterly history of the Church, and preserved, make a most valuable record. This, however, is not episcopal work, and no localized bishop could perform it any better than a capable presiding elder, yet it is needed by the local Church.

One of the practical errors in late years has been the making of the districts so large that the district superintendent can not properly handle his work, and has no time or motive for expansion. Having so much to do, there is little impulse to increase the work. This increase in the size of districts is usually due to pressure which comes from so-called economical reasons, but the size of the district defeats the intention.

Another weakness is the fact that in some, perhaps many, instances the district superintendent is not freely permitted to superintend, for dominating and sometimes selfish forces in the locality interfere with and possibly prevent independent superintendence to such an extent that, instead of superintending, the officer is superintended. If there was a localized episcopacy, the local bishop might come under the same constraining influences with similar results. What are

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needed are districts of moderate size, and over them district superintendents who are intelligent and strong executives, and who, seeing what is needed, will plan and really superintend.

Then, with the district thus supervised and superintended, and these local supervisors under and directed by the bishops, who are general superintendents for the whole Church, there need be nothing lacking in general or local supervision.

Under the system of our Church, therefore, every place has direct personal supervision from an officer who is on the ground and who is familiar with the locality.

The presiding elder or district superintendent is the local administrator, while the bishop is not a local but a general administrator, and, under the law and the constitution, is not intended to be localized, but is an "itinerant general superintendent," whose duty is "To travel through the connection at large," and "To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of our Church."

The bishop is not a local administrator, but a general overseer of the whole Church, and even the General Conference or the bishops themselves can not constitutionally make him anything else.

The great need is not to contract the bishop, but to magnify the presiding elder or district superintendent, or, in other words, not to make a lesser bishop, but a greater presiding elder, each doing his own work in his own sphere, and each doing it thoroughly.



CHAPTER XX  
THE SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM





## CHAPTER XX

### THE SUPERVISIONAL SYSTEM

THE ecclesiastical organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church has three conspicuous elements: First, it is a connectional system. It is not a polity giving local independence, but one in which all the parts are bound together and all are interdependent. The local Church is not independent of all other bodies, but all the Churches are bound together by and under a common government, so that each Church and each individual has a vital relation to every other Church and every other individual in the denomination and all act under the same law and the same general authority.

In the second place, it is a constitutional system, with a written Constitution which imposes obligations upon and which guarantees the rights of each and every individual, and every department must regard, respect, and obey the Constitution of the Church, from the General Conference and the episcopacy down through the Annual, District, and Quarterly Conferences, and down to the smallest local organization in the Church. Over and through everything the conserving, constraining, and commanding power of the Constitution is felt. So the Church everywhere acts under the protec-

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tion, the permission, or the prohibition of the Constitution of the denomination.

In the third place, the Methodist Episcopal Church has a supervisional system, which is a system of graded oversight, authority, and helpfulness.

This triple combination of essential elements in a general sense covers the governmental system of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but at this time we treat particularly of the supervisional system.

This supervisional system is marvelous in its simplicity, adaptability, and flexibility, and is the most thorough system of supervision in all Protestantism. Fairly worked, it is beautiful in its movements; properly worked, it is most effective in its results.

Every layman and every minister is in it, part of it, and under it. From the humblest member up to the most eloquent minister and the most venerable bishop there is a supervisional influence and power which holds each in check and stimulates all in religious activity and spiritual development.

Beginning in the local Church, the private member finds himself assigned to a small subdivision of the membership called a class and finds over him an individual who is called the class leader, whose duty it is to act as the immediate spiritual guide of the member and to aid him in his religious life.

Over the several class leaders in a local Church

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is the preacher in charge, to whom the leaders report and through whom the pastor can keep in touch with and direct the individual members.

Over a limited territory called a district, with its pastors and Churches, is a presiding elder or district superintendent, who supervises and superintends all the preachers and people in the district.

Then, over the districts grouped in the territory of the Annual Conference is the bishop, who supervises the presiding elders and in a more general way superintends the ministers and Churches in the Annual Conference and fixes the appointments of the preachers.

Further, there is the semi-annual Conference of the Board of Bishops, and once in four years the session of the delegated General Conference, which is composed of both the clergy and the laity, making altogether a most remarkable and complete supervisional system.

The bond binding all together is the episcopacy, which is not prelatical or high Church, which does not make the laws or the Constitution, but which is subject to the Constitution and the laws made in harmony therewith.

It is an episcopacy which is a department of the Church and was a department of the Church before there was any delegated Conference, and so has a priority which comes from greater antiquity. It is an episcopacy which was intended to be perpetual and which was, with its peculiar characteristics, perpetuated by the whole body of

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the ministry, which then possessed the sovereign power, by placing in the Constitution of the Church, and so incorporated in the Constitution, that, as a department of the Church, it can not be touched or changed by the delegated General Conference which has existed and does now exist.

*the* *the so* // The episcopacy was thus placed beyond the control of the General Conference that it might be a permanent feature in the Church and not subject to a sudden impulse, or an error of judgment, or a lack of understanding on the part of those who might happen to compose a General Conference.

It was, therefore, an episcopacy that is and must be, as far as the General Conference is concerned, perpetuated according to "the plan of our itinerant general superintendency," that existed when the Constitution was made in 1808. Under the Constitution this "plan" must likewise be respected by the bishops themselves, so that no bishop nor all the bishops can change it in any particular, but must faithfully observe all its provisions and conform to all it implies.

*fallacious* This "plan," with certain peculiarities and powers which the bishops themselves and all others must respect, allows the bishops, in the discharge of their episcopal duty, a certain discretion, latitude, and freedom of action with which the General Conference can not interfere and which the bishops themselves can not abandon, permit to fall into disuse, or allow to be taken from them because such discretion and liberty is absolutely

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necessary in the work of superintendence and is covered by the Constitution.

Thus a General Conference would not and could not say what Conferences a bishop must hold when they meet, or how and when or where a bishop must travel through the work. That belongs to the episcopacy, and even the whole Board of Bishops can not infringe upon the "plan" by interfering with the right of the individual bishop, who is the equal of each and every bishop. In view of these inherent and vested rights of the episcopacy and in recognition of these principles the Board of Bishops has a form of government in itself, and within these limits and privileges the bishops use their godly judgment and respect the rights of the individual bishop. These things the sovereign power of the Church vested in the episcopacy as a sacred trust, and this trust must be respected by all.

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Constitution*

Under this the bishops are to supervise and superintend the Church, and, under the "plan," they are free to arrange the work, determine the time when the Annual Conferences shall meet, divide the Conferences among themselves, decide as to their own movements, and use their discretion in fixing the appointments of preachers and in discharging other episcopal duties.

In the bishops, and in the individual bishop, there is and must be a certain discretionary power and freedom of action. Experience showed that to be necessary and it was involved in the "plan" of the episcopacy and included in the Constitution,

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because without such liberty to determine their own movements there could be no effective superintendence.

That episcopacy is not local but general, not settled but itinerant, not some sort or any kind of an itinerant episcopacy, but "our itinerant general superintendency," according to the kind, method, and "plan" existing in 1808, and neither the bishops nor the General Conference can destroy, modify, or change this episcopacy.

With the bishops at the top and the class leaders at the bottom, the Methodist Episcopal Church has a marvelously thorough and yet simple system of supervision.

To this system the millions of members and the thousands of ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church are most thoroughly loyal, though a few fault-finders may possibly be found.

Because something does not move to the satisfaction of some individual it is easy for him to throw the blame on the episcopacy or some other feature of the system, but if his ideas were carried out the dissatisfaction of others might be increased infinitely.

Absolute perfection is not to be expected, but the real difficulty, if there is any, in the Methodist Episcopal Church is not in its supervisory system, but in the non-working or the inconsistent working of the system.

In too many places the trouble is that the local Church is not properly organized as the law of the denomination directs. Indeed, in some in-

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stances they may be said to be disorganized or demoralized Churches, for the intention and command of the law are not carried out.

This may be tested by an inquiry as to a few fundamental facts. For example, ask whether a Church has its membership subdivided into classes, with a leader over and caring for the members in the subdivision. Ask whether the pastor is really acting as the head of his Church, thinking, planning, and executing, or whether he exercises no management, but permits others to direct or allows things to drift. Ask whether the presiding elders or district superintendents are studying and really superintending their work, or permitting others to superintend them and dictate to them and determine for them what are the needs of the district and what should be done, while they get along smoothly with the influential laity and preserve their popularity with the clergy.

Truthful and accurate answers to such inquiries may reveal where lies the real weakness, if there is any.

In too many instances forceful leadership has disappeared from among pastors, and there is a lack of strong superintendence among those at the head of a district, and on the part of some there is a disposition even to prevent the bishop from discharging his duty of superintendence in a free and independent as well as conscientious way for the good of all, while others not charged with his responsibility want to direct and perhaps dictate what shall be done, and then, if they do not ac-



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comply with their purpose, call down a multitude of woes on the bishop who has conscientiously discharged his duty.

Such things do not belong to the system. They are not the system or faults of the system, and can not be alleged against the system. They are errors that spring from individuals or local conditions, and they mean that the system is not comprehended, or, if comprehended, is not worked.

If the system is not understood, then instruction is needed. If the system is discarded or defied intentionally, a sterner course may be required. One thing should be insisted upon, and that is that the law should be observed and that there should be with a loyal laity an independent and self-respecting ministry, a strong district superintendency, and an uncoerced episcopacy.

Because a system has not been properly worked is no reason for its abandonment or for radical changes in it, but that the system should be properly worked.

The Church had its greatest prosperity in every department when the old system, which is the present legal system, was consistently carried out, and present failures, if there are any, are due mainly to departures from original righteousness in the working of the polity.

The trouble is not with the system, but with the working of the system. It is workable to-day as it was in other days. It can be worked now and in the future, and if the system is consistently, fairly, and fully worked, the success of the past



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can be repeated in the present and surpassed in the future.

Because a machine has not been well handled or properly run is no reason why we should break the machine to pieces. Perhaps all that is needed is to get a new engineer or to teach and train the old one a little better.

Because the machine has not been worked up to its full power when it might have accomplished very much more is no reason why an essential part should be removed from it, or some new thing put in it for which the machine never was intended. Either thing means damage and disaster.

What is needed is to study and master the mechanism. Perhaps all that is needed is to rub off the rust and oil the machine. Instead of allowing some parts of the machinery to run loosely or not at all, and try to make one part do the work of other unused parts, the wise thing is to key-up every part and apply the power throughout the entire mechanism, for when one part is pressed to perform the work of other parts, there will be strain, friction, and finally a serious breakdown.

What is needed is to use the mechanism we have, to put it and keep it in good condition, and to work it with skill and judgment.

We should work the ecclesiastical mechanism according to its intention. We can not afford to run it out of order, and nothing in it should be neglected: The smallest wheel and the most in-

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significant looking pin may be very essential in the working of the machine.

Loyalty to the system is necessary to its successful use. Respect for those who are charged with the management of the system is also an element to be considered, and there may be need for the cultivation of greater respect for those who occupy responsible positions in the Church, and particularly for the pastor, the district superintendent, and the bishop, for respect for those in authority has much to do in bringing about ecclesiastical success.

In any episcopal Church the episcopacy is a vital element, and in the Methodist Episcopal Church its peculiar form of episcopacy, namely, an itinerant general superintendency, is essential in the extreme. In this system the bishops are like great shuttles, shooting here and there over the land and weaving and interweaving the Church together into a glorious ecclesiastical fabric worthy of a great denomination.

Or, to change the figure, the Board of Bishops with their wide knowledge constitute a board of strategy for the entire Church, which thinks, plans, and executes and presents details which may be worked out and carried out by others, and so they are the head of the supervisional system as localized bishops could not be.

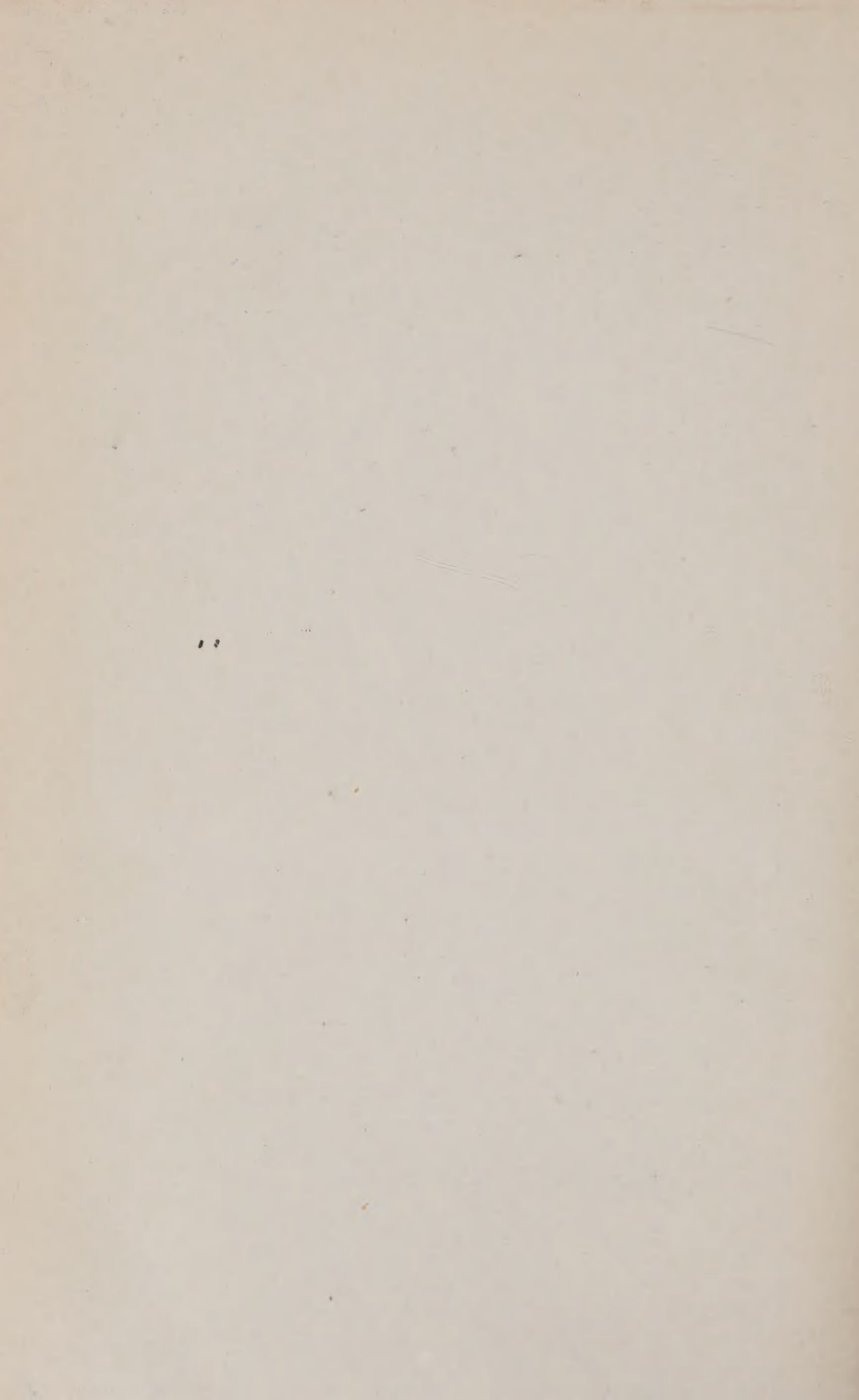
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